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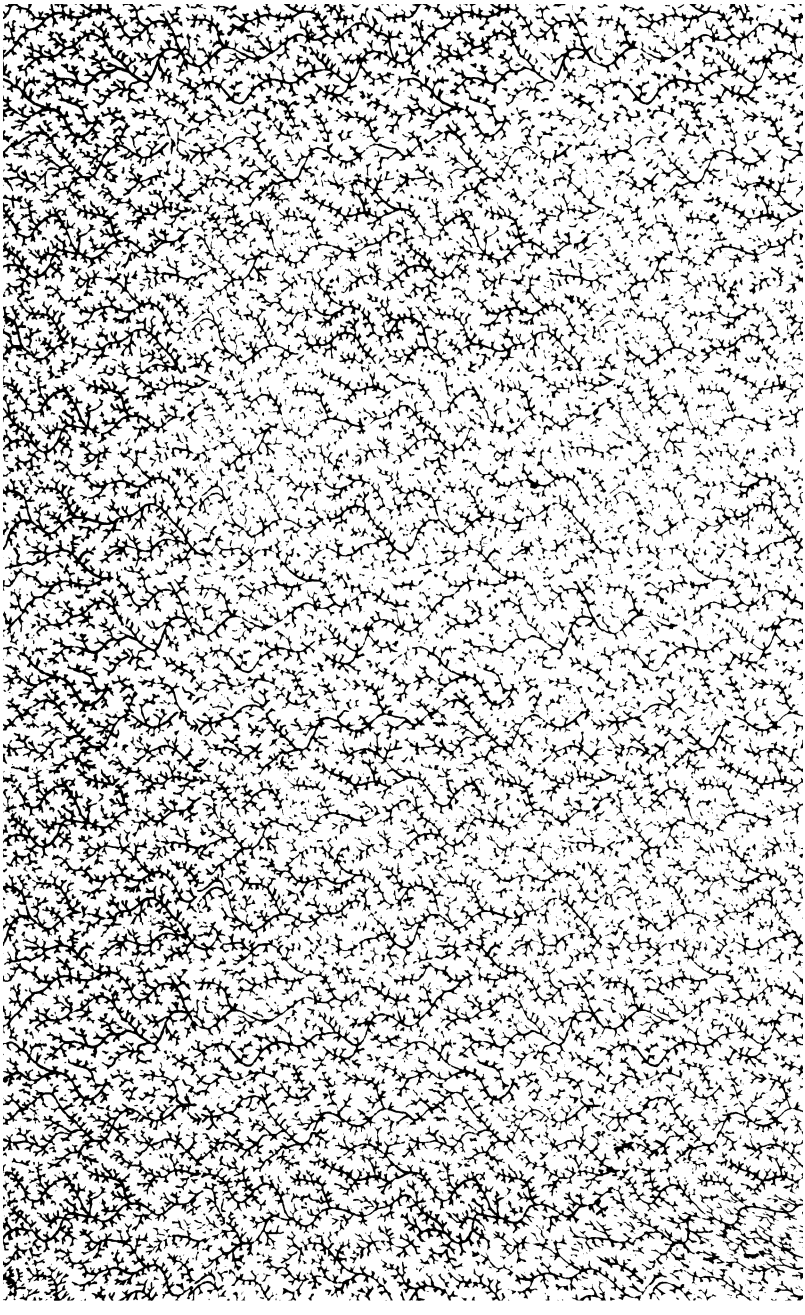

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Special Limited Edition

MANDERS

A Tale of Paris

BY

ELWYN BARRON

With Frontispiece

BY

T. SPICER SIMSON

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MANDERS

CHAPTER I

WHEN Manders began life he was eight years old. This statement does not warrant the inference that he had put off being born until he was ready for string-top and jack-knife. Manders conformed to the conventionalities at birth, and devoted the usual time to clamorous and practical opposition to those demands of life and infantage which seem to strike incipient men and women as so many absurd devices for their discomfort and annoyance.

Doubtless, were it left to the choice of the average boy, there would be a prompt reformation of natal conditions, and man would be born of woman as Minerva sprang from Jove, fully equipped for the moral and physical arena, where his energies are to be tried and defied. The human economy, indeed, already demands of science some such improvement upon the principal methods of the race in the matter of its self-multiplication. Some savants hold the opinion that the full fruits of civilisation are not

likely to be gathered into the store-house of perfection until it has been uniformly and successively demonstrated that full growth and mental completeness at birth are really the natural ordering. In support of this intelligent theory they have the most incontestable authority, the Scriptural exposition of Man's origin and establishment on the earth. Adam began the active work of husbandman within twelve hours after he had become a sentient being. His botanical, zoological and other information was plenary from the beginning. He was able at once to separate, classify and specifically name the animal, vegetable and mineral life with which his extensive estates were abundantly stocked and enriched.

Were it not that the confusion of biographies is something to be avoided, some confirmatory facts from modern experimentation might be offered here. There are the well-known but generally disregarded conditions of Standish Woolverton's attested birth and career. These circumstances afford the most conclusive proof that our ancient belief, that infancy and youth must precede manhood and maturity, is as much the outcome of ignorance and superstition as the one-time faith in centaurs and griffins, or the modern notions of heredity. Dr Spenlow's trustworthy history of "Physical Abnormities" includes all that is of physiological or psychological value in this peculiar case. Dr Spenlow, who was himself the attending physician, says Woolverton was five feet tall, and had a full beard thirty minutes after his

birth. In the morning of the next day he rode to hounds at the invitation of Lord Pondlewaite-Etherton. It was only two years later that he wrote the famous brochure on "Protoplasmic Detritus," which Professor Huxley confessed nullified all his own laboriously elaborated theories of life and nature. We all know how Woolverton fell a victim in 1873 to the demonstration of his theory that a raindrop falling through a vacuum of a thousand feet would acquire the fatal force of a bullet discharged from a gun. He was eight years old at the time—just the age at which Manders began life, but in that coincidence lies all the resemblance between the two histories.

Manders, I repeat, was born in the old, illogical, ridiculous and infantile way; so the declaration relative to the age at which he began life must be understood to mean the time when he found himself dependent upon his own unaided exertions as a bread-winner. Manders had had some parents of a careless, irresponsible pattern, and such ideas as they had inculcated in his prattlehood would hardly serve any but the most energetic of resolute minds as baits to a success of any appreciable kind.

The paternal Manders had gone through with a gentlemanly fortune in an ungentlemanlike way, the final sovereigns of it having disappeared before the real Manders, my Manders, was well rid of his swaddling bands. Having nothing more to spend, and wanting the aptitude to acquire the means of

continuing an easy existence, Manders *père*, thoroughly ennuied of an empty life, one star-blazed evening in the waning of summer, wrote a letter or two, strolled down to the Quai de Malaquais, threw the butt of his cigarette into the river and dived after it. When Madame Manders heard of this exceptional exercise of determination on her husband's part, her pretty face lost its colour, she wept in an irresolute, repining sort of way, and, not quite certain of herself, gathered Manders into her lap and kissed him.

"Tu n'as pas' un fader-r, mon pauvre; mon petit poor Edouard!"

She said this a great many times, sitting there swaying back and forth, as unresourceful as her child. There were about her the faded and worn remainders of a once artistic room—for Manders *père* had had taste of a kind, although he did scandalise and estrange his English family by really marrying a Quartier Latin *grisette*, suspected of posing for artists who were unable to paint draperies and despised landscapes. There are no tyrants like our artificial sensibilities.

Madame Manders never saw the something that had been her husband, which they got back from the care-soothing, shame-quenching, emotionless friend of humanity, the serpentine river, murmurous as the cooing of doves, as it rolls down to the sea.

"I cannot look upon him that way," she whimpered, dropping tears upon the cheek of the wonder-stricken Manders. "He would come that way into my dreams.

They say dead people stare at you so. I should die of terror." She shivered, and the child patted her throat, which was smooth and round and ivory tinted. It was a caress she liked. She always kissed him for it. She did now, and just the herald of a smile touched her tear-wet lips.

"Don't cry," said Manders; "if my papa is dead, we are going to have a ride in a carriage."

Two men came over from London in personal response to one of the letters written by Manders *père*. They took the long box back with them. Madame Manders went down to the Gare St Lazare. She had an instinctive clinging to the something in the long box. She would rather it were not taken away into that gloomy England. But, then, she did not know. The men were his brothers, they told her. Perhaps they had the better right to him; only it seemed to her that the box had in it the best days and nights of her girlhood; some memories, some hopes, some loves that belonged only to her. As she stood there in an absent way fingering one of the wreaths of flowers, a thought of some vague talk she had had with Manders *père* about the future of their child came into her uncertain mind. For the moment maternity spoke within her. Not very distinctly, not with any authority, but like the echo of a once dear voice, imperfectly recalled with still a note of sweetness in it. She pushed the child hesitatingly forward a step or two. There was the faint shadow of an anxious hope in her face—the

hope that is already a disappointment. She spoke in English. It seemed more respectful to the still friend there in the long box, that friend whose French always made her laugh—except, except when it made her sigh. The smooth-faced, but older brother was nearer to her—the one with something so stern, so forbidding in his eyes.

"Monsieur, this is his boy! His name is Edward, too!"

The brother looked coldly at her, without so much as glancing at the child.

"It is your child, madame."

"And his," pointing a trembling finger toward the box.

"We do not know that, madame."

She shrank away. She was not hurt. Her heart felt no resentment. She only understood that she and her boy had nothing in common with these grim men. She had never dreamed of money for herself; besides, she had known well enough that the Edward she had loved in an undeveloped way was the heir to nothing—lord of not a sou more than the money he had squandered in his idle fashion as they drifted from city to city until, in the year the Republic triumphed, the birth of the little one arrested them in Paris. But she had some dim, half-fearful, half-alluring notion of an English adoption for him, of an English education at the hands of those formidable rich relatives of whom Manders *père* had babbled over his boy's cradle in those hours of

half repentance, when he caught serious glimpses of his disordered life. She would like to have had her boy a gentleman; but, as it was not to be—*eh bien;* so much the better, perhaps.

The train began crawling out of the station. Madame Manders looked after it with a dumb longing that was succeeded by a dull sense of desolation as the last carriage quite disappeared from her view. She stood in the same attitude some moments, her eyes, not even misty now, staring ahead as if she still saw something that was strangely beyond her comprehension, and which held her gaze without occupying her thought. The child pulled at her gown.

"Mamma!"

"Oui, mon petit," she answered unconsciously, her eyes still on that distant, baffling vision.

"Allons, chez papa," said the child insistently.

"Oui, allons donc, mon pauvre." She turned unemotionally as he tugged at her hand, and they went out of the station, she walking through a dream.

Paris is a forgetful city. It knows only the present hour, and the passing event. It laughs or sobs, or shrieks, or roars in turn, under the breath of the moment, indifferent utterly to the thing it was doing the moment before. That is why everything is improbable, and nothing impossible in the future of France. Madame Manders, walking with her fatherless boy towards the 'bus stand, was partly aware of this unmindfulness. An hour before, when

the hearse, and the two mourning carriages passed along the streets, all eyes were turned upon it. Madame Manders had felt a sort of personal pride in her grief, as she saw hats lifted reverently while that velvet-covered, flower-decked long box, with its careless sleeper, went past. She had noted gratefully the thousand pitying looks directed towards her and the child by her side. Her bereavement was not without its distinction. Now no one heeded her, unless it was to peer into her face with that curious scrutiny which betrays an insolent admiration. This indifference to her affliction, this calm reduction of widowhood and orphanage to the commonplace, making them mere threads in the warp and woof of experience, grievously affected Madame Manders. All sympathy seemed suddenly withdrawn from her She felt alone, abandoned. As she took her place in the 'bus she had a sense of fearing people which her common sense chided; but she sank into a corner and lifted her boy on to her lap, as if he should serve her as a shield. Then she felt an inclination to laugh, and drew the unbecoming black veil more closely about her face. But tears came instead of the laugh, so versatile is the human heart.

Manders was unconcerned. Nearly six years of age was Manders now, but he still knew very well the gross folly of being much disturbed by such irrational things as death and the hodge-podge of mortal uneducation. The pity of it is that children, in spite of their instinctive rebellion, come in their turn,

through enforced imitation and study of their elders, to be uneducated, too, exchanging the wisdom of the eternities for the fantastic knowledge of a ludicrous ephemeral existence. Perhaps, if we were not at such pains to uneducate our children, cramming them into uniform mind factories, and applauding their progress in the obliteration of individualism, we might come, in time, to know a little of God's purpose in creating the world in which we antic. We never stop to consider how wonderful is the wisdom of a new-born babe uttering a vigorous protest against the cheat of mortality.

Manders, cuddled on his mother's lap, cast a look around, saw that, with the exception of himself, the 'bus was filled with self-created, self-deluded imbeciles, and so tucked his head down comfortably under the maternal arm and went to sleep. The rattle and roar of the heavy wheels grinding over the granite pavements could not reach into the region where his soul refreshed itself.

Once again, that evening, as he had on the four preceding evenings, Manders asked.

"Where is my papa?"

And Madame Manders answered as she had before answered, only this time without tears.

"He has gone for a long visit, my little one. Sometime we shall go to him. He will never come back to us."

Manders never asked the question again. Philosophy restrained him, no doubt; possibly it was only

the force of circumstances; for Madame Manders had the chance to sublet her roomy apartment in the Rue d'Assas, and straightway took a snug little *triolet* of rooms five dingy flights up in the dirty and crooked, if picturesque, Rue St Jacques, the oldest street in Paris, and comfortless, but adapted to the practice of economy. New associations begetting new ideas, Manders seemed to forget that he had ever had the responsibility of a father.

The English brothers had given Madame Manders a purse on the day of the going away, after she had signed some little paper the exact purport of which she did not attempt to grasp. The purse contained one thousand francs, and that sum made her tranquilly indifferent to the contents of the paper; but, had he been carefully consulted, Manders might reasonably have interposed an objection to so cheap a relinquishment of what really constituted his title of gentility, a claim on the Manders' family. At the same time one thousand francs immediately in hand are rather to be thought of than things remote and hardly contingent. With this money Madame Manders felt secure to indulge the mournful sweets of new widowhood without troubling her pretty little head with the problems of destiny indefinitely put off. The day after the funeral one of these problems offered to obtrude itself.

"Will you go back to posing?" garrulous old Mère Pugens had asked her. Mother Pugens had a little "tabac" and paper shop, and was *sage-femme*

as well. It was she who had ushered Manders into the world.

"How should one know what one is to do?" she answered, adding somewhat irrelevantly, maybe, "I hadn't had a baby then."

"Ah!" said Mère Pugens, glancing about the room indifferently. "Ah! my dear, once a model always a model—or worse, is what they say. You are young and pretty—you have to do something, I suppose. Well, there are only three things for one like you who can't so much as make a chemise; posing, re-marriage, or—well, you know what my girl Lisette has done for herself. But then Lisette was clever. Lord! lord! Lisette saw where the future hid its berries before she had quit wearing short stockings. She used to say, with a toss of her head in contempt of the shop, 'I'll be a *marquise* one day!' *Eh bien!* It is amusing. He isn't a marquis—no; but she rides in her carriage just the same. I saw her in the Bois last Sunday. She threw me a kiss, my dear. A good girl is Lisette, but no longer a child. She's forty, my dear—but she has had twenty years of it, and without having gone begging twice in the time. An estimable record, eh? And never ashamed of her old mother. That is the best of it. Now if you have a mind to consult Lisette—"

"Not at all, Mère Pugens," Madame Manders hastened to interrupt.

"As for that matter," said the old woman with a

curious smile that pursed her hairy lips, "I don't know that you need look as if I had spat in the holy water. Is it any worse than being a model? Lisette was a model for a while; she says it's a dog's life—the hardest work there is, and far from respectable. It is better to be a lady, my dear. And think what you could do for the boy. You can't do much for him now, I think; and as for the pay a model gets—bah! You'd much better roast chestnuts."

But one evening, three months after Manders had ceased to ask for his papa, Madame Manders was accosted by an old artist just as she turned into the Rue Sufflot on her way home.

"Is it you, Marie?"

"Yes, M. Monier, it is I."

Both were well pleased with the meeting, and they shook hands like old comrades, smiling frankly.

They could afford to be frank. When a woman is less than twenty-five and a man is more than sixty such a thing as candid friendship is possible between them.

M. Monier fondled the hand he held in both his own in an affectionately paternal way. "It has been so long since I saw you last I was not quite sure. You have changed—but not much. A little rounder than you were, Marie. Just a suspicion. Possibly an improvement, eh? But you are in mourning!"

"My husband, monsieur."

"Oh, yes; I remember. You left us to get married. So it is over? Humph! Are you sorry?"

"Oh, yes, M. Monier. He was good to me—nearly always. Sometimes we saw things in two ways; but he used to kiss me afterwards." It was as if she were addressing her father, attempting to clear his vision of a prejudicial mist. M. Monier quite understood. He gave her hand a final stroke as he let it slip from his clasp.

"And when did he die?"

"Three months ago. You know they found him in the river."

He knew nothing whatever of this. He looked into her eyes. He had forgotten that they were blue, that delicate blue which is perplexingly akin to grey, but he remembered them honest and child-like. He saw that same direct simplicity in them now, and he pulled at the grizzled tufts of his beard to hide a smile. He was amused by her unmindfulness that "found in the river" is not descriptive of an orthodox solution of the large problem.

"Then you are alone?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, I have my little one." There was no mistaking that sudden lighting up of her face, and he was touched by it.

"And you live?"

"For the present, monsieur."

"And after a while?"

"I don't know, monsieur. Something will come. I do not trouble myself." Madame Manders had a

dimple in her chin and a mouth like a Cupid's bow. What have these things to do with troubling or being troubled?

M. Monier shook his head.

"Then you don't care to come back to me now?"

"I don't know, monsieur. Why not?"

"There are not many models like you, Marie. My school needs you. Come, let us make a bargain."

"As you please, monsieur."

"Good. When can you come?"

"To-morrow?"

"Why not to-night? I have an evening class—charcoal idiots who can't draw with a brush." He flourished his hand eloquently.

"You are so droll, M. Monier. But I cannot leave my little one at night. He can be with a neighbour part of the day—I pay her ten sous—but she wouldn't keep him at night. Besides, I like to have him then myself. He is pretty, monsieur."

"I have no doubt of it. I see where he gets it." He chucked the dimpled chin, and the eyes above it laughed. "To-morrow, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"At nine?"

"At nine, monsieur."

There was much that was agreeable to Madame Manders in the idea of reviving a professional relationship in which she formerly prided herself. She had heard it said that hers was the best figure in the Latin Quarter, and she had never thought herself

called upon to disclaim the fact. It did not disturb her a great deal that some of the more exacting students had declared her head and body to be of no kinship, the one having been designed for a doll at the Bon Marche, the other having been fashioned after the Eurydice of Nanteuil. She had taken it upon herself to examine this admirable treasure of the Luxembourg, a figure in which the roundness of maturity and the seductive charm of youth were wonderfully balanced. Therefore the criticism conveyed only a compliment to her by no means logical little mind, for she knew very well the advantage of being a young Venus in an art quarter where good heads are in a great majority over shapely bodies. This reflection made it possible for her to reply to her critics with amiability, "If my head offends you, you should never look above my bust."

But quite as persuasive as the whisperings of a gentle vanity was an inexplicable yearning to escape the portentous dignity of her *rôle* as Madame Manders. Her husband had been precise and formal in this particular. In the presence of others he always addressed her, referred to her, as Madame Manders, and the indulgent world took up the cue, so that every fibre of the poor creature's body stiffened into a responsive dignity that kept her on the rack. It never occurred to her to interpose an objection, but she so hungered for the old familiar name and the frank, Bohemian life under the reign of the *ateliers* that it is probable the prospect of being called Marie

by the students had as much to do with her ready agreement with M. Monier as the desire to hear praises of her charms. This naïve trait of a simple temperament may be accounted for in the fact that Madame Manders was, notwithstanding the opinion of the insular family Manders, a woman of so genuine a virtue that marriage and maternity had not profaned the maidenliness of her character. The idea here so imperfectly defined was comprehensively expressed by Pointin the first time he saw her posed for Roder's Eve. After eyeing her in pleasurable silence for some moments, he said, in a half serious way, "You should make a faithful likeness and call it 'Aphrodite Exempt de Péché'!" A very charming compliment if you will analyse it; certainly an extraordinary tribute to a professional model for the nude—in the Quartier Latin.

When she stepped out of her apartment to go to the studio on the morning after her agreement with M. Monier, Marie left Madame Manders behind, and tripped into the street as coquettish a model as any that ever danced her heart and reputation away at a Bullier ball. She felt deliciously animating thrills in the thought of her return to a productive independence. She was pleased with the expectation of her welome at the school, an expectation more than realised, for everybody was enthusiastic. It was a day of agreeable sensations, and the evening retrospect was a triumphant renewal of the day's experiences. She had lifted Manders to her shoulders and

mounted the stairs with him in a gale of merriment, on her return from the studio.

"Houp-la!"

Manders was very well content. Marie had revived. She had put off her mourning garments in obedience to professional demands, and in some indefinable way the mourning had gone out of her heart at the same time. It must not be supposed that Marie had not loved her husband. She loved him very much in her way, and as long as his fine person and indolent affection had their direct influence upon her. But Marie had never been fully awakened, and she was as incapable of a self-sustained emotion as little Manders himself, and the dead Edward was as far away from her as from the child, and for precisely the same reason. After all, we too often mistake a constitutional dolorousness for elegiac fidelity, and confound with levity and insincerity the amiability and graciousness which attest a good heart and a generous soul. Prolonged grief argues a disturbed conscience. Marie's conscience was as clear and untroubled as the water in the great basin of the Luxembourg gardens under the blue of a still June morning before the children have come down with their boats. Being thus tranquil of soul, she could be no other than light of heart. She was soon done with weeping; "the maman who smiles," as Manders named her, came again, and she and her boy were children together, the toys of the one being the amusement of the other. One looking in upon the

cosy, well-ordered, really pretty little room which Marie called salon, and seeing the two innocents at play upon the floor in the candle-light, might have been tempted to think that Manders *père* did rather a good thing when he threw that cigarette butt into the Seine.

Of course, Marie had liked the champagne suppers and the curious assemblies in which strangely assorted reputations, male and female, showed their native hues through the tobacco smoke, and where jests were laughed at less for their wit than for another sort of pointedness. But then, too, she had liked before that the beer which *sans gene* students had paid for in the dim cafés; she smoked their bad cigarettes with a sense of exquisite indulgence, and she listened to their droll stories in an abandonment of easy mirth. The fact is, Marie was one of those truants from Arcadia who live in the passing hour, and who have little to do with hopes, and nothing whatever to do with repinings. Child of the moment, she honoured her paternity. Earth makes flowers—roses and lilies, violets and daisies, all the fragrant and delicate blossoms and blooms that rejoice the desolate world—out of the smiling women who fall asleep in her arms. I wonder what Marie will be? Some gossamer-petalled orchid, no doubt, whose very spots shall perfect its scheme of beauty and refine its purity.

CHAPTER II

In M. Monier's day class, for which Marie posed, was a young Virginian whose success in figure drawing was in inverse ratio to the intensity of his application. He could do very well with a pencil, but his colour was invariably as flat as the canvas. M. Monier had a fine contempt for what he styled "charcoal draughtsmen." He would say to his pupils, "If you can't learn to draw as you paint, you are in the wrong school. You may do very well as an architect; you will be of no earthly good as an artist." Those who persisted in the belief that it is necessary to learn to draw with a pencil, were compelled to choose between the night class and some other school. "I won't teach mechanics by sunlight," growled the old artist doggedly. As it was esteemed an advantage to belong to the Monier school, which was limited in numbers, and had the constant care of its honoured founder, the evening class was full despite the opprobrium attached to it. Walter Blakemore, perhaps induced by that spirit of chivalry which makes a Virginian think that he must choose the more trying of any two

courses, elected to stay with the day class, despite frequent admonitions from his derisive fellow students "to go and join the charcoal burners." His inability to master the tones and shades that simulated the hills and valleys and plateaus of the microcosm had become a class legend. When one student borrowed a trifle of another, the bond offered was some such jest as, "I'll repay you when Blakemore learns to draw," a phrase that came to stand for any indefinite duration of time. Blakemore at first had the indiscretion to resent these mockeries of his talent, and made frequent and rash offers to "clean out the class," offers at which his fellows railed exasperatingly, declaring that the only fearful thing about him was his brush. But one morning when the badgering was more than commonly persistent Blakemore had withstood it with a composure that was most disconcerting to the others. "I'll beat you fellows yet," he said with so much calmness that it sounded very like the declaration of one quite able to carry determination into effect. There was a roar of mockery to be sure, but M. Monier, who entered in time to hear the prophetic menace, exclaimed heartily, "It wouldn't surprise me in the least, my boy. The spirit is everything. Application, resolution, courage, patience—that is all there is to genius—you'll find genius in those words if you look for it, and you cannot get hold of the real article without them. Well, young gentlemen," he said with a sudden change of manner, and rubbing his hands together

in a sort of self felicitation, "I've some pretty news for you. We are not to have Antony this morning. "No, you shall have a new model if you will, and Antony may go to the night class, eh?"

There were some murmurs. Antony was a shaggy ruffian who might have been one of the mountain bandits of his native Italy before this reverend whiteness got into his hair and beard; several of the students were eager to try their hand at his strong features and rugged torso.

"Very well," said Monier, "you shall choose." He made a sign to the massier and Marie was ushered in.

"If you please, M'am'selle," bowing, and pointing to the curtain behind which Marie retired. M. Monier seemed very well satisfied with himself. He moved about humming unrelated fragments of operas, saying now and then to one or another of the grumblers, "You shall choose! Antony, if you will!" with the manner of being quite convinced that there could be no choice in the matter.

Presently Marie emerged from the curtained corner. With the utmost gravity M. Monier, suppressing every external sign of exultation for what he read in the students' faces, conducted Marie to the shade. "Gentlemen, this is Roder's Eve, will you take that pose, M'am'selle?"

Marie, smiling a little proudly, assumed the desired attitude.

"You recognise it, gentlemen?" M. Monier spoke with an assumption of indifference that perhaps

deceived no one but himself, for the hum of admiration and the exclamations of artistic appreciation left him no doubt that Antony would become the prey of the charcoal burners.

It was in this way that Marie resumed herself, and felt again the flow of nature through her veins. There was a rebound of vitality. No longer feeling herself under constraints of a semi-conventional life, she imagined herself restored to the impulsive girlhood from which marriage had too unwisely snatched her. Forms and conditions and a reason for things were swept away from the province of her being, and she was no more to be held to account than were the sparrows which fed on her window ledge, when she broke crumbs to them to please Manders. And Marie grew younger, and prettier, and gayer under a happiness that she took in as unconsciously as she breathed the air. She radiated so much cheer that all the class partook of it, and the painting lessons became labours of love, even Blakemore coming under the influence of the enthusiasm sufficiently to establish a respectable relation between the thing aimed at and the thing performed.

Marie came to feel a sympathy with the young student who seemed to her bent upon achieving success in a pursuit for which he had the least aptitude. He was but little more than her own age, and she thought him an exceptionally good example of his sex,—tall, broad-shouldered, fair, proud in a way, but with a smile that was the key to any heart

he cared to unlock. He had, moreover, an air of gentility that made its impression upon her, so that to her sympathy was added a great deal of respect. After two or three mornings Marie found herself looking with increasing interest upon his canvas as she passed it on her way to and from the estrade. She began to hope that he would get on; but generally she experienced a penitential regret as if she herself were in some way to blame for his slow advancement.

This mood was heavily upon her one day when he seemed to be more than usually earnest and less than ever productive. It was near the end of her third week. "Poor Monsieur Blakemore!" she murmured to herself as she dressed behind the curtain. Then by degrees, a little with each garment she put on, the idea came into her slow little brain that, perhaps, she might help him. There was a pleasant stimulus to her fancy in the thought. She knew very well that Blakemore nursed a sort of dejected ambition to have his work recognised in the class exhibition, and her thought was that there really might be a possibility if only he could have more time than the others at his work. She decided to give him the opportunity. That is why she lingered behind the evergreens of the little café across from the gare Mt. Parnasse, waiting until Blakemore should come along. He appeared after a time, and Marie, free from the affectations of coquetry, yet not without reserve, came forward to meet him. There were no words wasted

in needless preliminaries. Models and students are not stupefied by conventions. Marie smiled and held out her hand. Marie could smile like the Madonna Dolorosa, if any one can understand what I mean by that. A smile that at once pities and assuages the grief of humanity. Marie imagined there was a necessity in the present instance to pour out this balm of healing and refreshment. Blakemore understood something of this when he looked into her face, and he answered her smile before she had spoken a word.

"This is mighty nice of you, Marie. By George! I believe you read my thoughts in the class this morning." He spoke laughingly, taking her by the arm and moving up the boulevard with her. "Then you don't think me quite hopeless?"

"Oh! Monsieur Walter!"

The reproachfulness of her tone was lost in the comical turn she always gave his name, which she pronounced "Voltaire," with a sustained rising inflection on the final syllable. Marie spoke very good, that is to say fairly grammatical, English queerly. Her words fell into order in general accord with rules, the result of her six years' fidelity to the exactions of an English husband, but it was sometimes necessary to make a reflective analysis of unaccustomed sounds before one could be certain of many of her words. But there was an artless charm in her speech that went very far toward persuading a masculine hearer that expression could not be

better. Blakemore was much gratified by the friendliness of her reproachful exclamation.

"Then you don't despise me for the way I am doing you?"

"I suppose I should be very angry with anyone who makes me look 'muddy'" she said, peeping up at him archly. "But one has to learn, is it not so, Monsieur Walter? And I thought that, perhaps, if you had more time—I mean more time with the model—you might—eh, Monsieur Walter?"

"Clear you up a bit? that never occurred to me! And will you do it?" he inquired, with eagerness. "Will you give me the time? I'd be sure to come out all right! And I'd pay you better than they do at the school, too!"

"Oh, as for that—" she began with a pretty protesting flirt of the hand. But Blakemore interrupted with the rush of one anxious to conclude an advantageous bargain.

"When can I have you?"

"Oh! every afternoon."

"But I can't come in the afternoons—that is to say seldom. How about the evenings?"

Her superior knowledge of art rebuked his uncalculating ardour. "But you can't paint at night, Monsieur Walter! Think of your colours!"

"Hang the colours, Marie! The bother with me is form. Besides it's all nonsense this raving about daylight. I would just as lief have the effects got

by gaslight. I'm going in to be original, anyway. Let us say evening, eh?"

"Very well," she assented, a little amused.

"Then it's settled. You know where my rooms are?"

"Oh! but you must come to me. I cannot leave my little one."

She said this with an air of comical importance. It rather pleased her to make conditions. It gave her a feeling of authority to which she was not used.

"You may come to-night."

"But to-night I have an engagement! I could come after ten, though. How would that suit you?"

"The hour is nothing to me. One time or another as you please."

"To-night, then. I'll begin at ten. Do you know, Marie, you are a deucedly accommodating, nice girl? I'm awfully obliged to you. I'll beat those fellows yet! See if I don't. By George! I'll make you a handsome present if I do. You can have anything you ask for!"

"You'd better not promise that," she said with a sagely warning shake of the head. "I have been thinking of a little house with a garden!"

"Oh!"

She laughed at him. He walked with her as far as the observatory, and their special bargain was made, for Blakemore viewed the matter in a strictly

commercial light as far as Marie's services were concerned. She was to have forty francs a week, considerably more than she got at the school, for the time she might pose for him. She would have preferred to give her services to help this handsome, inept student to success; but as Blakemore had plenty of this world's goods he could see no virtue in Marie's vague scheme of useless self-devotion. She sighed as she consented. In her precious shallow pate she had set up a glowing shrine sacrificial to a pretty heroism, and it disappointed her that Blakemore turned out to be prodigal rather than impecunious.

Manders was snugly in bed and serenely asleep when Blakemore came to begin his strategic labours that night. As the two conspirators were thoroughly in earnest there was no time wasted in idle formalities. Blakemore set up his easel and arranged his paints and brushes, a new outfit procured for the occasion, while Marie prepared to repeat her pose of the morning. The subject was a somewhat whimsical treatment of the "Desolate Ariadne" prostrate upon the sea-shore. Marie's *sommier* served imperfectly to typify the wave-serried sands upon which she curved in delicate nudity. The pose was an easy one to keep for any reasonable length of time, but Blakemore, utterly absorbed in his work, quite forgot the running minutes, and the period for rest came and passed and came again without admonishing him. Marie was not disposed to inter-

rupt him. They had scarcely spoken since he first moistened his brush. This young man was, in spite of a certain moral variableness, one of those strenuous creatures who have a way of getting quite inside their occupation; "the conquerors" some absurd philosopher has styled them. Marie could see the expression of increasing satisfaction in his face as he applied himself in freedom from critical or satirical comment, and it pleased her. Considerably after an hour of this concentrated work Blakemore uttered an exclamation of self-appreciation.

"I am getting it, Marie!"

"I am happy, monsieur."

He pushed back in his chair in contemplative way, his brush poised in readiness for any sudden inspiration. "That is going to be something like."

Marie rose under the influence of his enthusiasm, and came to look over his shoulder. Really the result wasn't so bad. There was chance for an en couraging word.

"Oh! it is beautiful!"

"Not just that, Marie. That is a little strong. But it is coming on! I'll show those fellows yet! You are a brick, Marie." He looked up. Recollection seized him. "By George! I've been a brute. I've let the fire go down! I've kept you at it a beast of a time! Why didn't you throw something at me? Are you cold? Wrap this blanket around you. I'll rebuild the fire."

"Oh! I am not cold; not tired," she had been pro-

testing during his self-reproaches and hurried movements. "I am so happy that I am really helping you. Come; let us go on!"

"No," he said, as if he were mastering a great temptation, "I am not ruffian enough for that. Besides, I'm very well satisfied. I have reached a point—and I've caught a trick! Do you see the curve on that shoulder? Monier could not do better! That itself is good enough for one night. It was an inspiration you proposing this plan to me. It's going to be the making of me; I'm certain of it. I'm going to kiss you for it. There! Well, shall I help you to dress?"

"No," she said, smiling at the idea of anyone helping her to dress; and then a pensive look stole away the smile as she remembered that Manders *père* had liked to help her in the days of the honeymoon, and before he was Manders *père*. Possibly there was just the tinge of sadness in her voice as she added, "I shall not dress. I shall just put on my night-gown and slippers—unless you will let me get you something to eat?"

"No, I'll get something to eat at Petitfour's. By the way, why not come along with me? It is early yet. Everybody will be there."

"But I cannot leave my little one."

"You should have a *bonne*."

'Oh, no. I like it better to take care of him myself. We are such good friends, and he is so wise! Ah! as for that, sometimes I'm much afraid of him,

he is so wise and I so foolish." She said this in a deprecating way, but laughed as well.

"Manders is a jolly little chap, and you are a good girl, Marie. I'm going to be interested in you both, I see that."

"But you don't know my little one."

"I'm going to, though. And you forget that I have been introduced to him. You know he knocked his ball into me in the gardens one afternoon."

This was an amusing reminder to Marie, and an agreeable one as well, of an incident that occurred the third day after she had returned to posing for M. Monier's class. It was this petty accident that had fixed her notice upon Blakemore. She had taken Manders into the Luxembourg gardens for a romp, and their ball tossing, in happy disregard of persons passing, had been to the injury of Blakemore's radiant silk hat. He was so gracious about it and patted the abashed Manders so comfortingly on the shoulder, and said so flatteringly to Marie, "Oh, you are our pretty new model, aren't you?" that Marie could not help exploring the class for him next day. That is how her sympathy with him began.

"You were droll," she said, "but very nice!"

"Yes, a man is always comical with his hat knocked off."

He had got the fire going and Marie, in gown and slippers, seated herself before the cheering flame.

"This is good, she said. "Won't you sit down, too?"

"Yes, long enough to safe-guard this wet paint a little, then I'll bundle it up and be off. I'm going to leave my easel and paints here."

"Of course," she assented.

Soon after, Blakemore went away, but instead of going to Petitfour's he stopped at an unfrequented place and had a bit of supper. He was not in the vein for the conversation of revellers and idlers. Ideals were spinning their illusions through his brain. He could not just decide why, but he felt a confidence in himself nothing had awakened before. He had done his first hour of really absorbing work, work that was shadowed by no self-consciousness, no sensitive dread of disparagement, and the result struck him as good. He was very grateful to Marie. It was all due to her. She had given him the right impulsion. He had a jubilant sense of the end to which it would carry him, for he had in this felicitous way got hold of the clue that should guide him out of the maze in which he had been groping for more than a year. He had laid hands on himself, so to speak. He strolled home in the light of the low-hung stars, and thought them larger and more brilliant, and the texture of the purple-black curtain behind them richer in velvet bloom than he had ever seen them before. Very sweet are the first sips from the poisoned chalice that Ambition holds smilingly to the lips of the credulous! Blakemore went home

to lie down to rosy dreams in the clear perspective of which was a salon picture hung on the line.

He was early at Marie's the next night. The table had just been cleared, and Manders was marshalling his tin soldiers under the lamp's light. Manders came forward to have his head patted and to make an apologetic little speech relative to the incident of the misdirected ball. Blakemore gave the boy's cheek a friendly pinch.

"I think it was my hat that got in the way, Manders."

"Oh, I knew that all the time, monsieur. Well, I'm just going to kill some Germans."

"Take care they don't kill you," laughed Blakemore.

"Oh, they can't do that! *Je suis Anglais*," declared Manders conclusively, as he went back to his play.

"He is his father's child, Marie."

"Oh! yes!" she smiled sweetly. "I am quite afraid of him. He is so wise."

"He is all right. Well, shall we get to work!"

"I shall be ready as soon as you, monsieur."

Soon Blakemore was engrossed in his work, and Manders was no less attentive to his battles. War is a very absorbing pastime. It is even more peremptory than painting, and the child, directing the prodigies of fate, was wholly oblivious to what passed behind him, although Blakemore was full of talkative ardour this evening. At length, when

the victory which he foresaw was complete, Manders turned with an exultant shout.

"They are all dead, maman!"

His glance took in the painter and his model before he had done speaking, and the last word was almost lost from the sentence, muffled as if there were not breath to utter it distinctly. The boy stood transfixed for a moment. The laughter drifted away from his face, and a curious infantine look of surprise came in the place of it. A gradual intelligence took hold upon him. Something he did not understand began to master him in the clenching of his little fists, in the clouding of his curl-draped face. The blood left his cheeks, and the gust of a ghostly tragedy touched and froze his heart till the pain of it hurt him, and he cried out—a cry so sharp, so savage, so unlike the cry of a child, that the others were startled by it; but before they were aware what it meant, the little man had rushed against the easel, beating it down with his fists, and had flung himself shelteringly upon the nude breast of his mother.

Blakemore, amazed, imagining that some accident had happened, came towards the child, who was pouring out an unintelligible jargon of furious sounds. As Blakemore approached inquiringly, Manders turned upon him fiercely and shouted,—

"Don't touch my maman! Don't dare to touch my maman!" Words the more menacing for being spoken in French.

Singularly enough, Blakemore had no inclination to laugh. On the contrary, he looked in arrested wonderment at the child, and then his eyes turned in appeal to the mother; but Marie, holding Manders with one arm close against her breast, was trying in vain to draw protectingly about her the cover of the couch, her face scarlet with shame, her hot tears raining down upon the curls of her boy.

Blakemore understood. Eve had become conscious of her nakedness. A well-fortified man of the world, or even one who had reached the cynical stage of the sexual cult, would have seen the humour of the situation. But Blakemore had the misfortune to be a youth in earnest. He felt a ridiculous tightness in his throat, and recognised his helplessness as he gazed upon these two children, the one quivering in the defence of an idol assailed, the other tremulous in unmerited self-abasement. Knowing nothing better to do, Blakemore took up his hat and stole softly out of the room.

CHAPTER III

WHEN, next morning, M. Monier, observing a fixed rule, came into the *atelier* an hour after the time at which the class-work should have begun, he found the students, twenty in number, standing or lounging idly about, with their canvases untouched. The unwonted noise he heard as he came up the stairs had forewarned him of something amiss, but he was none the less surprised to see his usually industrious pupils unemployed.

"Why are you not at work?" he asked, as he surveyed the groups from the doorway.

"That is what we would like to know," came in responsive chorus. "What have you done with Marie?" There was so much concert unanimity in the demand that M. Monier suspected a rehearsal, and to forestall any planned impertinence, he put himself into a rage of remonstrance. He could storm very well, and with so much suitability of savage aspect that the most familiar of his pupils never doubted the genuineness of his wrath. He alone knew the hypocrisy of it. In the confessional of his private emotions, M. Monier pitifully admitted that

his heart had been beaten to a pulp by human sympathies, and was no longer capable of resistance to the plaints of frailty. The contradictory weaknesses of his character were known, however, in more than one squalid abode in the poor districts through which he prowled of an afternoon, "looking for material," as he said to any chance-met acquaintance, but in reality putting into practice some crude notions of communism he had imbibed with his mother's milk. It is not, perhaps, a pleasant commentary on the prejudices of our modern society that one should be ashamed of one's philanthropy and try to conceal its donative phases. But man born of the flesh must take note of the conceits of the flesh, and we have made it axiomatic that he who giveth openly hath an axe that needeth an edge. The spirit of diplomacy which led M. Monier to mask his benevolence with a niggardliness in personal expenditure, taught him to hide his sentimental infirmities under a *brusquerie* of speech and a severity of manner that had at least the virtue of keeping in subjection those of his pupils who subordinated the exactions of art to the blandishments of pleasure.

Therefore, imagining that the show of idleness argued a purpose to frolic that might involve a joke at his expense, M. Monier launched into such a flood of invective and abuse as temporarily stunned the students into silence. "*Paresseux!*" with a finely ironical prolongation of the final syllable, was the most complimentary term dis-

charged through the shaggy moustache that ambushed his kindly modelled lips. He strode to the platform, which he mounted, gesticulating and volleying as he went, and continued his harangue until he had but breath enough to order the students to set to work.

Seizing upon the advantage which exhausted nature gave into their hands, the students with one accord, and at the top of their voices, repeated their salutatory demand,—

"What have you done with Marie?"

For the first time M. Monier noticed the absence of the model. He looked about him. She could not be in hiding; there was no place for concealment, the curtain of the dressing corner being looped up and the barrel near by offering too snug a retreat for Marie's by no means diminutive body. Besides, a calmer regard of the faces before him convinced the master that he had been theatrical without reason, and a touch of chagrin subdued him into apologetic mildness. He felt, too, some anxiety on Marie's account. She was punctuality's self. Her custom was to be in waiting as the class assembled. She had not been late a morning. Most certainly Marie was ill.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I am to blame for scolding you. But if we cannot have one model, we must do with another. I saw an old woman in the passage. Call her in, someone."

The *massier* retired, and presently returned ac-

companied by Mère Pugens, who carried under her arm a square frame half covered by a copy of the *Figaro*.

"Make haste, my good woman, get ready," said M. Monier. Then, turning a wry face to the students, he added, "We must content ourselves with charcoal this morning. No time to get new canvases ready."

This solemn announcement was received with a roar of derisive laughter.

"We don't want to draw spheres," said someone.

M. Monier himself smiled. Mère Pugens was rather round. It was difficult to say where one curve left off and another began, the geometrical progression was so carelessly defined.

Interpreting the amusement of the class in her own way, Mère Pugens, addressing herself to the master, said with some little asperity,—

"Oh! you may laugh at the old woman now, M. Monier, but I remember very well the time when you thought Ernestine Naquet quite a tidy figure on the platform! You were a student yourself in those days, M. Monier, and not above taking liberties, as I am alive to swear. Oh! *mon Dieu*, yes! I could tell these pretty gentlemen that you used to smile in quite another way when this same Mère Pugens —who wasn't Mère Pugens then—came to pose in the lamplight two flights up in the dirty alley off the Rue de Sevres. Not so very long ago, neither, if thirty years are half a lifetime! And let me tell you, gentlemen, it was not posing that gave me up;

it was I that gave up posing, I, myself! And do you think I have brought my respectability here now to be painted after I have established myself in the world? Not at all, M. Monier! *That* is what I come for, M. Blakemore," thrusting the package she carried into Blakemore's unwilling hands, "and to tell you, M. Monier, that Madame Manders is done with posing, too. I might have said it as prettily as she told me if I had found pretty people to say it to—but a service soonest done is best done. Good morning!"

Mère Pugens, drawing her undulations into such dignity of carriage as she might, turned herself toward the door, singularly rosy of countenance.

"And is it really you, Ernestine?" M. Monier called after her laughingly, yet not unblushingly.

"Not at all! not at all! Only a fat old woman, at your service!" responded good Mère Pugens, as she went out, leaving the door open behind her. It is a fact in natural philosophy that ponderous persons never slam doors. That variety of emotional expression is reserved to the lymphatic temperament.

If M. Monier had any misgivings as to the effect of Mère Pugens' somewhat imaginative revelations on the minds and spirits of his pupils, they were soon dispelled. Those young gentlemen, unmindful of him, were expectantly interested in the tell-tale countenance and abashed manner of Walter Blakemore. His awkward attempt to secrete the unmistakable package by thrusting it down between his knees attracted

a curious attention to it. He was surrounded by a crowd of chaffers slangily bantering him on the conquest of a brobdingnagian Phyllis with a chin beard, and demanding to see her portrait.

Tom Milsom, who, by reason of his diminutive stature, was the admitted bully of the class, and engineered most of its mischief, made a sudden dive for the frame, upsetting Blakemore in his eagerness, and tore away the covering as he raised his prize to view.

There was a hoot of disappointment from the others. Instead of new sport for a merry morning, here was only the "study" upon which Blakemore had been labouring under their eyes for the past week, a study they already had gibed at to their satisfaction.

"But wait a minute, boys!" said Milsom, squaring the canvas on to an easel, "there is something amusing about it. Don't you see!" He turned with an expansive smile to catch the expressions of his fellows and to enjoy the confusion of Blakemore. "Isn't it amusing? Eh? He has been painting by lamplight! You can hear the colours howling. I told you Blakemore was an original, didn't I? He's going to get into the salon, aren't you, Walter? You ought to have your colours better labelled, my dear. But I daresay it doesn't much matter. We are getting some queer notions in art. It's all in the way you see things. Eh, M. Monier?"

M. Monier had approached the group, and was

looking at Blakemore's work with a seriousness that arrested Milsom's nonsense. He came nearer and took up the canvas.

"Humph! You worked on this last night, M. Blakemore?"

"Yes," replied Blakemore, simply enough, but it seemed to amuse his friends, for they laughed.

"Then Marie is not ill?" said M. Monier, as he returned the canvas to its place, a shrewd gleam in his eyes.

"How should I know, M. Monier? I have not seen her since the early part of last evening." At the same time there was a guilt-offering of blushes in Blakemore's cheeks, and his eye wanted its habitual pride of candour. Remarks of the various kinds that rather admit of hearing than of repetition, but which lose quality when paraphrased, were good-humouredly hurled at him.

"Young men will be young men, and women will be women," sagely reasoned M. Monier, running his fingers through his beard and looking in reproachful indulgence upon Blakemore; "but you should not have stolen our favourite model. You should have robbed some other studio. Professional ethics, you know. However, you have shown taste in your selection. We can all testify that your mistress is well to look upon."

M. Monier imagined that he had foreseen some such termination to the exceptional devotion of the class to this one model for whom they voted with

scandalous regularity week after week, except when Marie had demanded a week or two for her own pleasant uses. His suspicion had not rested on Blakemore, however, and it did not altogether surprise, though it mystified him, when Blakemore, in chivalrous resentment of things said around him, hotly exclaimed,—

"You are a lot of beasts, who don't know a virtuous woman from a cart-horse—"

"Nor a boudoir from a billiard table," volunteered a withered youth, in plum-coloured velvet suit, from beneath a white *beret* that overspread him like a sunshade. "That is the sort of not-particular people we are."

"You are not getting mad, Blakie?" queried Milsom, giving an impish twist to the ends of his promissory moustache. "Don't, my dear. I daresay you are quite welcome to her—you can have my share; but you might have let us finish out with her here."

"Yes, Blakemore, let us have her for the rest of the week; don't be a pig." This was said with that drawling deliberateness which seems to be a protest against the necessity of speech, an almost comical characteristic of Nelson Parker, an Englishman of Blakemore's age, and unintentionally a close competitor with Blakemore for the booby prize in drawing.

"Quite right, Blakemore; Parker's claims are as good as yours, don't forget," cried out someone, provoking a general volley that, through its very

excesses, restored Blakemore to his good-humoured equilibrium. His gusts of temper were commonly followed by more than compensating bursts of sunniness. He clambered on to one of the stools, smiled charitably, waved his hand tranquillisingly up and down, right and left, and secured something akin to attentive silence.

M. Monier, who was in the doorway, took advantage of the lull to say,—

"We won't do anything until after *dejeuner*. Afternoon as usual."

A shout of "Long live Monier" followed the retiring master, and Blakemore was invited to begin his confession.

Blakemore's voice was peculiarly melodious in speech, and the rich tones gave an interest to his commonplaces. "He never says anything; it is the way he says it," was a sufficiently descriptive Hibernianism of Milsom's to account for the readiness to listen to the young Virginian in an oratorical mood.

"I want to tell you fellows something," began Blakemore, knocking the ash from his cigarette and expelling a cloud from his lungs.

"Put it in 'nigger,' old man," advised the youth under the white *beret*.

This was an allusion to the excellence with which Blakemore imitated the delightful dialect of the Southern negro, a dialect much abused by persons who know it only as they learn it from the caricature of negroes seen and heard on the minstrel stage.

"No, I want to be serious with you," answered Blakemore. "I'm not going to make a speech, either. But I want you to understand me. I am not a moralist." (Interruptions more or less derisive.) "My admiration for Joseph has its limits, and I never took much stock in St Anthony; but there are varieties and modifications of virtue which I very much respect."

"The more modified the better," interposed Milsom.

"It may be the fault of my early education," continued Blakemore, not heeding the laughter at Milsom's sally, "but it is my rule to believe every woman innocent until she prove herself guilty."

"You should go out more," said Milsom, borrowing a light from his neighbour.

"You fellows have a notion, it seems to me, that every girl who has to work for her living is herself an article of merchandise."

"*Experientia docet* is a very respectable maxim," remarked Milsom.

"If you put on the 'stultos,' yes," retorted Blakemore, "but clear-witted chaps get some values out of their own centres of conscience." (Cries of "Oh! oh!" and "What are you getting at?") "I just want to say this as pleasantly and as inoffensively as the circumstances will permit;—when I see a man who takes it for granted that every unprotected woman is a *cocotte*, I suspect that he is a blackguard who is doubtful of his own paternity."

"Oh, come, I say now! That's putting too much

bitters in the sherry," remonstrated the white *beret*. Others echoed him.

"Now, just one word about the girl you think I have taken for a mistress," said Blakemore, insistently, when the commotion had subsided somewhat. Simply, but with persuasive earnestness, he told of Marie's offer to aid him in his work, and, with a sensibility that surprised himself, described the incident of the evening before. The picture of the moral drama in the modest little home in the Rue St Jacques perhaps took too much colour from his own emotions, but it was so effectively drawn that even Milsom smoked in silence, letting pass more than one opportunity for the discharge of a cynicism.

"Three cheers for little Manders," said the white *beret*, when Blakemore pointed the climax of his story by getting down from the stool.

"And three cheers for Marie," said Parker. "She's all right."

Having the morning at his disposal, and no definite plan to occupy the time, Blakemore determined to start out with his sketch-book for a walk along the *quais*. Bathed in the luminous colours of a June morning, the rich green of the overhanging trees, and the opalescent lights of the craft-ruffled river tempering the vivid flame to a harmony with the grey of the houses and the blue of the sky, he thought there could be no place in the world to offer more inspiration to an appreciative painter than the busy, life-thronged *quais* of Paris. Here was

everything but altitude and distance to fill full the measure of desire. Character in all its variations; riches and poverty in all their degrees; happiness and misery in their extremes; romance and mechanism; poetry and materialism; infancy and age; here gathered in the comforting warmth of the benches, or under the shelter of the stately, carefully-tended trees, or on the breast of the waters, or in the crowd of the streets, quiescent or in motion, the world centralised, types of the nations in juxtaposition, life epitome! Yet the artists of Paris housed themselves in studios in vain strivings to vitalise the nude!

Blakemore, who reasoned with himself in this wise, did not yet see clearly enough the obstacles to the carrying out of the plan for artistic reformation he had formed for himself in this particular. He was to awaken artists to a realisation of the possibilities of the *quais*, possibilities which he thought were too much disregarded, and it had become a habit preparatory to this mission that, in idle hours, he should take his sketch-book and pocket box of colours and go down to some chosen spot on the river to make the little *aquarelles* which were to authorise his future canvases. If there were no foolish enthusiasms in youth, there would be no noble achievements in maturity; and the world owes much to the zeal that breaks in pieces on the rocks of its own uncovering.

Going a little out of his way, guided by an attraction of which he was unconscious, Blakemore

strolled into the Luxembourg Gardens. There was the customary swarm of children of all ages noisily engaged in their various sports, and he recalled the afternoon in the first days of spring when the ball thrown by Manders had knocked off his hat. Doubtless Marie and Manders were somewhere in the Gardens now, though they were in none of the groups he could examine about him. There was a crowd about the empty bandstand, however. He loitered there for a while. He hoped he might catch sight of them, and yet was not altogether sorry not to come upon them. He was not quite sure of his ground. He had not wholly rid himself of a sense of guiltiness that magnified Manders into a formidable person whose dignity of soul had been greatly outraged. Blakemore did not like the idea of being abashed by the gaze of a child to whom he could not explain things. This reflection grew in importance with each failure to identify some woman and boy with the objects of his half-evasive search, until finally he got into retreat before it and went on in the direction of the north-east gate. When he came opposite the De Medici fountain, with new thoughts in his mind and anxiety subdued, an urchin in blue blouse, over the shoulders of which danced a profusion of golden-brown curls, came running across the walk resolutely calling,—

"Monsieur Bla'mo'! Monsieur Bla'mo'!"

Blakemore stopped.

"Yes, Manders." He smiled in a propitiatory

way and put out his hand hesitatingly. He had an amused recognition of the fact that he was afraid the boy might not shake hands with him.

But Manders was a peace messenger, and he promptly thrust his own into the outstretched hand.

"And how are you this morning?" There was gratitude in Blakemore's tone.

Without replying to the question, Manders, who spoke either English or French very prettily as occasion required, though he commonly mixed them, proceeded immediately to declare the reason of the arrest.

"My maman says I am to tell you that I am very sorry that I was not genteel last night."

"Well, are you?" with a quizzical smile.

"I don't know. I don't like being rude," was the diplomatic answer.

"You were not rude. You were a very manly little fellow. But you didn't understand. Do you understand now?"

"Maman told me, Monsieur Bla'mo'." He said this with a great deal of gravity, looking frankly into Blakemore's eyes, and without offering to withdraw the hand Blakemore still held in a self-defensive way.

"And what did your mamma say?"

"She said it is never to be again." Manders certainly did have a disturbingly wise way for one of his years. He spoke quite as if the decision were of his own ordering.

"No; it is never to be again," assented Blakemore, with a final pressure of the sturdy little hand. "And you and I—are we to be good, warm friends?"

"Maman says you are a very nice man, and that I must be very nice to you."

"Where is your mamma?"

"Over by the fountain. There, you can see her leaning over the railing, by the last urn. She saw you coming along the walk. She sent me to you. But I should have come anyhow if I had seen you myself."

"Come, then, let us go to her."

It was easy enough to meet Marie now. Indeed, he thought it rather strange that Marie should blush as he came up, and be so eager to bend over Manders, kissing him repeatedly as if he had returned after a long absence, forgetting to offer her hand, and babbling hurried nothings which Blakemore converted into apologies for her folly of the evening past. He was aware of a pleasingly aggressive kind of happiness. The soft air of the morning, the splashes of sunshine, the moss-burnished, time-darkened stones of the fountain, and these two figures in the immediate foreground, conspired to strike the note of truancy in his spirit. He had lost his morning; why not make a day of it? The idea saved him from any embarrassment over Marie's unintelligible murmurs; he cheerily disregarded her want of reserve.

"I am awfully glad I happened to run on to you, Marie. I was just going to take a boat down the

river, it is such a jolly day for an outing. Come along with me. Let's go to St Cloud for breakfast."

He spoke with such frank heartiness that she suddenly forgot that she had some reason for diffidence in the presence of these two, the man towering above her, and the child in her embrace. All feeling of that sort vanished before the welcome vision of a day of festivity in the country—for everything outside the fortifications was country to Marie. She looked up eagerly, her face radiating an infantine delight that almost immediately went into cloud as she looked ruefully from Blakemore to Manders.

"But you see I have the little one. I told Mother Pugens she would not have him to-day, and—"

"Nonsense! We don't want to leave Manders with any Mother Pugens. He is going with us; eh, Manders?"

"Oh! Monsieur Bla'mo', I love a ride on the river!"

"Come, then, away we go!"

And away they went, Manders between the two, holding a hand of each, frolic in their eyes and pleasure in their hearts, for a holiday, such as this promised to be, went into their red-letter souvenirs.

They were not the only ones to whom the charms of the river appealed, for the boat on to which they pushed their way at the Pont Royal pier was crowded with pleasure-seekers. They could only find standing room on the forward deck, but it was

all one to them whether they stood or sat. To be on the gay river, the waters slipping under the swift little steamer, the banks of masonry, the busy wharfs, historical memorials, quaint scenes, a rich panoramic variety on either side gliding by them, earth, water, sky and all that moved in them seeming to rejoice in the full animation of the young summer, was so stimulating to the three friends that physical discomfort could not so much as threaten them. It was an additional pleasure to be jostled and crowded by eager fellow-excursionists who made every inconvenience the occasion of a friendly compliment. French crowds radiate amiability, when their mood is sunny, as no other crowd can.

When the boat arrived at St Cloud it proved to be the destination of the majority of the passengers. There is no resort more favoured by Parisians than the former residence of the vanished kings and emperors of the inconstant French. Blakemore, Marie and Manders had a numerous company to attend them up the hill. It was one of those days, too, in which St Cloud abandons itself to wedding breakfasts or early dinners, the scene being one of white-robed festivity about the principal restaurant to which Blakemore led his guests.

"Oh! but there is a crowd!" said Marie, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks flushed by the agreeable excitement of her easily stirred emotions. "We sha'n't be able to find a table!"

"We'll find something," Blakemore declared con-

fidently, and presently they were seated comfortably at the edge of the terrace under the cooling branches of a wide-leaved sycamore.

There was plenty of time to reflect upon what they should have for breakfast. Service is tardy at St Cloud, as it is at most holiday resorts, but then eating is the least important incident of these merry gatherings; laughter and the babble of pleasantries are the vital considerations. An occasional admonitory "Garçon!" answered by a propitiatory "Voila!" may indicate the proper bounds of quiet forbearance, but the course of events is in no wise affected by these casual interjections.

Blakemore hardly looked to Marie for intellectual interest. What it was that attracted him more than her physical beauty and magnetism he would have found it difficult to say, but that there was more than a sensuous charm he very well understood. He revolved the delicate problem as he rolled a cigarette, listening to her joyous prattle, watching the play of gladness in her grey-blue eyes, and the coming and going of smiles that matched so well with the deep dimple in her chin.

"She is so deliciously feminine," he thought, but was unaware how fully the words defined the artless creature in pink and white across the table from him. Man in general cares very much less for woman than for femininity; Blakemore was especially susceptible to that type of the feminine which politeness names medieval, and which strongmindedness terms imbecile.

The more seriously man has to battle with the conditions of life, the more positively he has to discipline and operate his mental forces, the more he is inclined to seek recreation and refreshment in the society that offers the lightest resistance to the repose of intellectual energy.

"What a bore it would be," Blakemore continued, reasoning with himself, "to come to St Cloud for an afternoon with a woman who has studied history in order to talk politics, and whose acquaintance with art and literature is made an excuse for a jargon of critical platitudes."

Impulsive gratitude for present freedom from such tyranny of foolish learning caused him to give the convenient ear of Manders a friendly twist as he asked,—

"Well, what are you going to have, my boy?"

"Cake," replied Manders, with the alertness of a well-prepared mind.

"Of course," laughed Blakemore; "but what else?"

"Beer," said Manders, again speaking a part rehearsed. They were served in time, and gave a leisurely attention to the things set before them in order, making altogether a very cheerful and memorable breakfast.

It rather surprised Blakemore that, in spite of himself and the incessant sounds and scenes of frivolity about them, he and Marie drifted into a discussion of a subject as serious as the education of Manders. His father had taught the lad to read

and he could scrawl a succession of curiously spelled words in the pretence of letter writing, but Marie confessed that she had given little or no thought to his further advancement. She imagined him too young for school, and opened her eyes with rebuking incredulity when Blakemore insisted that he could read Latin when he was at the age of Manders.

"Then why are you not a priest?" she asked, Latin and the Church being inseparably united as cause and effect in her philosophy. But persuaded finally of a maternal obligation to equip Manders with better arms for the human warfare than could be got at the domestic fireside, a conclusion which inclined her to tears, Marie confessed that she was rather too poor of purse to indulge these somewhat eccentric notions of Blakemore.

"Well, then, look here, Marie," said Blakemore, lighting the brandy he had poured over the sugar lump in his coffee spoon, "let's make a bargain. I've got plenty of money and no one in particular to spend it on. I've been over here studying art for two years, and old Monier says my ideas of colour and drawing are altogether too original for me to hope for any great success in undraped figure work. He says I'd better go in for clothes and landscapes in which bad lines can be tolerably well concealed, and which admit of some caprices in colour. He is a fool, but I'm thinking of following his advice. Now, you have made up your mind not to pose any more in the old way, and yet you have got to live in some

way. What I propose is this, you become my model for indoor and outdoor work—dressed, Manders, always dressed, you know—pose for me and for no one else, and I'll give you double studio wages and start Manders on the road to education. What do you say?" He sipped his coffee, looking at her over the rim of his cup.

Marie laughed in an unsettled sort of way. The plan rather appealed to her, but she had an idea that it was Manders who should decide the question. She looked at him, but that young gentleman was busy getting the last particles of custard from one of the baffling little pots invented to discourage the eating of that tempting delicacy. She spoke to him.

"What do you say, *mon petit?* Shall I send you to the Lycée?"

"All right," responded Manders, without lifting his eyes; "but I suppose they'll make me fight."

In this way it was agreed, and Blakemore took it upon himself to enter Manders at the École Alsacienne, but a short distance from Marie's home, on the coming Monday. The three friends felt in their several ways that a matter of moment had been the outcome of that *dejeuner* under the trees, and the older two realised as well that they had made for themselves a bond of union closer and stronger than that of mere material interests. In Marie's absurd little brain Blakemore was transfigured as a hero; in Blakemore's contemplation Marie was a defenceless, helpless *mignonne* brought under responsible protection,

a protection that seemed to him wholly philanthropic and dispassionate. As for Manders, the prospect of coming into self-reliant contact, in the mysteries of school life, with strange boys filled his fancy with alluring enterprises, and he began to think Monday a long way off.

As a finish to their day, they took the charming walk from St Cloud to Versailles through the Bois de Fausse Reposes, the sun having slipped below the far rim of the world to give the scene the glory of the after-glow as they arrived tired but well content at the station in time to catch the express for Paris. What a day it had been! Youth is the only alchemist.

They had a compartment to themselves, and presently, weary of the gradually darkening view from the window, Manders, in a proprietary way, settled down, and went to sleep with his head pillowed against the breast of "Monsieur Bla'mo'."

"You see, we are going to be excellent friends," said Blakemore, smiling at Marie across the way, and patting Manders softly on the shoulder.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Walter, very good friends—all three, is it not?"

CHAPTER IV

BLAKEMORE lost no time in putting his agreement with Marie into operation. He had a studio and suite of rooms *rez-de-chaussée* in the Rue Danfert Rochereau, the side door of his salon opening upon a miniature garden, the vine-draped walls of which enclosed with great privacy a broken fountain and a decrepit tree. A splash of sunshine in the early afternoon warmed the petty square into a glow of beauty, and filled Blakemore's mind with fanciful notions of what might be done with a pretty woman well posed in relation to the nymph of the fountain. In this exclusive space he might experiment in colours to his heart's content unabashed and unscrupulous. Failure should be his teacher, and what success he might chance upon would have a double sweetness. Out of the art talk he had heard in the two years of his student's life one bit of advice from a great painter had been chosen as his oracular guide, "Never be afraid of spoiling your canvas. A hundred failures weigh nothing against one success." He spoiled canvas profitably—if not to himself, certainly to M. Foinet, the benevolent dealer in the Rue Notre Dame des Champs.

"I am not coming in the afternoons for a while," he had said to M. Monier the day after the excursion to St Cloud, which declaration in some occult way amused M. Monier.

"Eh, well! Treat her well," said the old painter.

"It isn't that at all," answered Blakemore, rather irritated.

"Of course not, of course not," chuckled M. Monier. "It never is."

Misjudged, as the disinterested always are, Blakemore had the sense to waste no words in self-vindication. He carried himself off with all the dignity of his proportioned six feet, and some hours later began transferring to canvas his impressions of a young woman in a yellow gown of the Directoire style. Very contenting work he found it, and very agreeable was the half-hour of rest, when he and Marie sat in the somewhat luxuriously furnished salon, sipping wine from their glasses and nibbling *petits gâteaux*.

The day in the country had brought about wonders of understanding between them. Marie thought that she had never before known anyone quite so well as she seemed to know this considerate yet familiarly intimate young American, who had become the patron of Manders and her own benefactor. Under the influence of emotions she might not have been able to define, she revealed phases of character and qualities of mind which gave Blakemore a better opinion of her intelligence, and a clearer insight into

her nature than before. He perceived a womanliness at the back of her ingenuousness that might, under stress of the right circumstances, develop into a force, equal on the one hand to an heroic martyrdom, or on the other, capable of tragic abandonment. He caught himself following a train of possibilities in either of these opposed directions, curiously balancing chances, noting the changes taking place in the hypothetical Marie, pursuing step by step a succession of imperative incidents to the inevitable *dénouement*. He became so interested that for the space of ten minutes he said nothing to Marie, his eyes fixed dreamily upon her face as if he read in its sweetly placid expression the index of his fancies. A casual remark of hers had seemed to him the key to her as yet unlocked character. A showy *demi-mondaine*, no older than Marie, a table or two beyond them on the terrace at St Cloud, had attracted their attention, and given rise to some worldly conversation between them.

"I should not want to be bad," Marie had said, "but has a woman any choice, Monsieur Walter? It depends on so many things beyond her control whether a woman shall be good or bad. You see, the world has been made by men for men. We women," she made a pretty flourish with her hand as she laughingly looked up into the sweep of branches over her head, "we women are like the leaves on the tree—tell me, which one, when the wind blows, will fall and which one will cling to the stem?"

This was an astonishingly sage observation to come from the red lips of blue-eyed, dimpled-chinned Marie, and Blakemore was without a ready answer to it. He had laughed at her and said,—

"It is the nature of leaves to tumble, you know. They cannot argue the point, and they don't know the difference between the tree-top and the mire. You haven't offered a very good illustration. Try again." He lightly struck a leaf from the branch with his stick as he spoke.

"Eh, well, Monsieur Walter, it is all the same to you men. You knock the leaves from the trees, and you trample on them when they have fallen. But it doesn't matter. Leaf or woman, they are in the world for man's pleasure." She smiled, but there was just a shadow of seriousness in her eyes as she looked at him, seeming to invite a negative response.

His reply was banal enough.

"Yes, good women are here for man's pleasure, Marie; and it is only with good women that we find real pleasure. Only a few of us, after all, are asses enough not to know this."

"Do you know some of the good women, Monsieur Walter?"

He looked at her intently a moment before answering. The question was sincere. There was no mistaking the wistful, straightforward eyes.

"Yes, a good many, Marie."

"I should like to know a really good woman."

"You are one yourself, Marie."

He said this with much earnestness. She looked at him in eager thankfulness.

"Oh, thank you, Monsieur Walter," she exclaimed, and then turned with such ill-concealed pride to give the curls of Manders a caressing stroke that Blakemore thought nothing could be more touchingly infantine. Then it was she made the remark which Blakemore received as the key to her perplexing personality.

"I don't dare believe you, Monsieur Walter. It appears to me that I have always been asleep inside, and that if I should ever wake up it would terrify me. And sometimes it seems as if I were just going to wake up, and my heart stops beating. You know, I think there are two or three Maries besides myself? Am I not a fool, Monsieur Blakemore?"

"Two or three Maries besides herself!" What sort of creatures were they?

It was the train of events shaping the lives of these several Maries out of the possibilities of the innocent in the yellow gown that bore Blakemore so far into unconsciousness of the Marie before him.

"Have you forgotten me?" asked the embodied Marie finally, knocking the ash from his cigarette playfully with her fan. "Isn't it time we got to work? You will lose the sun."

"Yes, come. You see how easily I get lazy with half a chance. I daresay you will have to brace me up a lot. You are a straightaway sort of chap, aren't you? You will keep me at it, eh?"

She, laughing, looked up at him as he came beside her. "Yes, if you do not work very, very hard, I shall stop posing."

"And serve me right, too." He kissed her cheek, and they returned into the garden, to be sober-minded.

Marie's sober-mindedness had a vermilion tone that betrayed itself in her cheeks. Blakemore's frank kiss, though bestowed in a careless, incidental manner, as unemotionally as he might have filliped a particle of ash from the lapel of his coat, had been by no means as lightly and as indifferently received. The telegrapher may unconsciously touch his finger to the key of his instrument, but he sets in vibration a current of warm vitality that runs on to the end of time. Marie was one of those sensitive creatures to whom a caress is never without significance, with whom every familiarity is put under special interpretation, no allowance being made for the casual impulses by which so considerable a part of average conduct is ruled. In the estimation of such women, a kiss is either an injury or a beneficence, something that in either case readjusts former relations—a new element entering into the problem of values.

Marie rather mused upon than reasoned from the incident, but her musings were at once satisfactory to herself, and not uncomplimentary to Blakemore.

"He is not like the rest. We are going to be very happy, Manders and Walter and I."

There was no more a "Monsieur" Walter for her;

that slight barrier of frivolous reserve had been whiffed away in the twinkling of an eye. She did not send her thoughts very far into the future. It was not her way. Sufficient unto the day is the pleasure thereof, was her principle of being. What might come was a thought much too vain. "If we cannot tell what will happen to-morrow, why vex our heads about it?" she had a demure way of asking, and her life with the morally flaccid father of Manders had not tended to develop her small sense of personal responsibility. But as Blakemore always had an eye to the future, expending his energies upon plans for days that were to follow to-morrow, Marie could but be influenced to some extent by the work of which she was an inactive but important part, and in the fragmentary visions that carried Blakemore to success, in her fancy she caught glimpses of herself revolving in the orbit of his happiness. Being useful, and therefore helpful, to this young man was a present joy to her. It did not occur to her to consider a possible time when she would no longer be necessary to him.

In the course of the third sitting, the afternoon of the day in which Manders valiantly entered into his campaign against primary education, old Fanchette, the shrivelled *bonne* in charge of Blakemore's *ménage*, came into the garden babbling apologies and holding a note in her hand.

If Monsieur pleased, there was a servant at the door waiting to take Monsieur's answer.

The note came from an address in the Avenue Marceau, and Blakemore, who did not at once recognise the handwriting, uttered an exclamation of surprise as he glanced at the signature. Marie watched him curiously as he read it, and she imagined he had rather a kindly feeling for the writer, who she had no doubt was a woman, one of those good women, perhaps *the* good woman.

"A good joke on you, Marie! I'll laugh at you over it when I come back. I must go and write an answer."

He tossed the letter on to the stool and ran into the house, followed by old Fanchette, who cackled away cheerfully, notwithstanding no attention was given to what she said.

Marie, not well schooled in mere fashionable scruples, and feeling perfectly free to partake of any merriment of which she was the object, innocently took up the note and spread it open. As her acquaintance with written English was distinctly formal, she read with some difficulty the angular script that was then much affected by young ladies who studied modes in handwriting as they followed fashions in dress.

"DEAR MR BLAKEMORE,—What a time I have had finding out where you live! And how astonished you will be that I can afford to spare a moment from my very first week in Paris to any young gentleman who makes himself difficult to find.

"We arrived, mamma and I, just a week ago. Our second 'outing' was at St Cloud the day you were

there. You may resent our not making ourselves known to you, but the fact is we were just the least tiny bit afraid that the young woman with you (it was she who drew my attention to you) was not too respectable, and mamma has the bad taste to be particular about such things. I should not have minded it myself. Fancy having to be as circumspect in Paris as one is at home! It is like burning candles by daylight. If I had imagined what a needle-in-the-haystack hunt I was to have for you, I should have defied mamma and taken my chances on the aforesaid young woman.

"However, our amiable consul happened to know enough about you to give me your address—though I haven't the remotest idea where this ridiculously hyphenated street is—and I proceed to lay hands on you. Are you free for Tuesday afternoon? If so, will you come over at three o'clock and go with us for a drive? And we might go to one of those wicked restaurants I've heard so much about for something to eat afterward. (*N.B.*—I hope you will have the grace not to say that *I* suggested anything so indecorous!)

"Do come! I have quantities of Washington and Baltimore gossip for you, besides a scrap or two picked up in New York.

"Mamma sends her compliments—or she would if she knew I were writing to you.—Sincerely yours.

"FLORENCE STOREY.

stand you either. She suspected that you were not 'too respectable' only because you are French and were out with a young fellow for a holiday. But she would be very greatly shocked if she could imagine that anybody suspects *her*. Miss Storey is what you call *gai*, but thoroughly *comme il faut*. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Then I am not to come to-morrow?"

"Why not? Come and bring Manders with you. There are books and pictures and the piano to amuse you, and Manders can play here in the garden. You can have dinner here. I'll tell Fanchette. You can be mistress of the house, and be very jolly about it. And you might make Fanchette set things round a little. She is not the tidiest of housekeepers. And look here, if you want to be awfully nice you can sew some buttons on this jacket."

"Eh, well! But have you any buttons?"

"No, you'll have to buy some. But take your position. You've got to give me an extra half-hour or so. I can't have to-morrow afternoon a dead loss, you know."

"I am going to get you very large buttons," she said, smiling and adjusting her gown into the right folds, "so large that they won't go through the buttonholes."

"So I won't wear them off, eh?"

"Yes; you look better with your jacket open, also. You have a very good—what do you say?"

illustrating her meaning with an upward sweep of her hand.

"Chest?"

"Yes; I have noticed it."

Admiration of strength bespeaks the normal woman.

Florence with a husband who will do you credit as a son-in-law. What more can a reasonable man ask of his family?"

"Well, why don't you encourage Walter Blakemore? He is the sort of man I'd like to see Florrie marry. He is just like his father as I knew him at college, and he promises to be as fine a man as his father is now. I believe they like each other, and if you would just let Florrie alone—"

"Really, Henry," Mrs Storey interposed, with that smile of mixed indulgence and reproof with which superior minds correct our follies, "I can't let you run on in that absurd way. Your romantic notion of wanting to marry your daughter to the son of an old schoolmate and army comrade is an eighteenth century sentiment not at all in accord with the practical intelligence of our times. New social conditions are making in this country, and it is necessary that one be in the movement if one does not want to be overwhelmed by it. I have ambitions for Florence. I am investing your fortune in a social speculation. Now, don't meddle. I understand Florence perfectly. You have $500,000 well invested in her name which she is to have as a wedding portion—"

"If we don't go to pot before."

"Don't interrupt. With that amount of money and her appearance—besides, she isn't a fool—I expect to do very much better than surrender to

Walter Blakemore, excellent young man that he is. There is no place in the world where a title counts for as much as it does in the United States—and a pretty girl with $500,000 can pick up a very respectable title in the money markets of Europe."

"Pooh! I don't believe Florrie cares a damn for a title," said Mr Storey, bluntly.

"I am glad you have so early introduced man's substitute for argument, my dear. I can conclude that the subject is settled between us, and we need say no more about it. You concede a point with charming candour. Shall we get ready for dinner?"

The characters of the parents having been thus generalised, there need be no attempt to analyse the disposition of the daughter, who, taking something from the natures of the two, grew to womanhood under the exclusively maternal direction.

There had not been a great deal to justify Mr Storey in his idea of bestowing Florence upon Walter Blakemore. An intimate childhood, modified by several years of separation on the removal of the Storeys from Virginia to Mississippi, a subsequent renewal of friendship when Blakemore came out of college and profited socially by his father's judicial position in Washington, Florence being then little more than sixteen and Blakemore not yet twenty-two, some further increase of interest by brief seasons in Baltimore, at the seashore and in New York, and then Blakemore's running away to Paris with a sudden resolve to fashion himself into an artist—

these were the too unsubstantial foundations upon which Mr Storey builded his unauthorised romance of paternal providence.

It had been three years since their last meeting, and Blakemore wondered if the change of address from "Dear Walter" to the "Dear Mr Blakemore" of the note in his pocket argued a corresponding change in the sentiments of Florence, and meant to inform him that their friendship was to be conducted upon a more strictly formal basis. As the *fiacre* began the ascent of the Avenue Marceau at what seemed to him an unwonted speed, his thoughts, which had been composed enough until then, got into an abominable panic. He could not recall a like experience of humiliating fear. Coming opposite to the fatal number, he had a strong inclination to tell the cabman to drive on, and as he climbed the heavily carpeted stairs towards the second floor, they seemed to give way beneath his feet. The expostulatory phrases he addressed to himself were not sufficiently reassuring, and he hesitated some moments in moist anxiety before he mustered courage to pull the bell-rope. Five minutes afterwards he marvelled what it was had made him such a poltroon.

Florence came alone into the salon to welcome him, calling out to him as she entered a greeting of such frank pleasure that he hardly noticed how much addition of personal distinction the last three maturing years had given her, and only recognised the friend to whom he had said good-bye on the sands

at Long Branch when the stars were shining. Old acquaintances who, after some years of separation, meet in Paris for the first time are not ceremonious. The atmosphere of that city is a different chemical combination altogether from that of any other, and it acts upon foreign systems so instantly and so radically that victims of it are unconscious of the alterations they undergo. Blakemore, who had been long enough resident in the vivid capital to have recovered something of the normal balance that returns when reason has had time to strip the life of its artificial gilding, recognised the familiar symptoms in the feverish vivacity of Miss Storey's conversation. He was not at all surprised nor much shocked when, in answer to his conventional question as to how she liked Paris, she said, with a comical impulsiveness that took off the edge of her words,—

"It makes me feel as if I were full of the devil!"

"You will get over that," he said, laughingly.

"Oh! I should hope so. But I am afraid it is going to be so slow a process that I'll be burned to a cinder before the season is over. Why, when we came down the Champs Elysee yesterday, swinging along through that brilliant crowd, I had a mad wish to tumble the coachman off the box and take the reins myself. I'd give anything to drive full head down that splendid avenue just for the sensation of it. But as that is out of the question—mother is becoming villainously prudish—you've got to

find me a vent for my excited state of mind, which is dangerously high pressure."

There was not much that was serious in the mischievous eyes into which Blakemore looked, but he thought there was the shadow of more than banter in her words. "Why the deuce will girls talk in this way?" was his mental comment, but he said aloud in her own vein,—

"Well, what would you like to do?"

"Something wicked—something desperately wicked! What is there one can do? Something to remember and blush about when one is old and axiomatic?"

"You shouldn't expect that sort of thing in Paris. There is nothing wicked here. Everything is conventional, even suicide. You cannot do anything to shock the Parisians."

"But, you stupid fellow, it is not the Parisians I wish to shock; it is myself!"

"Very well; I'll think of something."

Mrs Storey came in, several degrees gayer in dress than Florence, and appearing not so many years older. The lady had so far improved upon nature in the matter of complexion as to have secured a youthful bloom and smoothness of skin which seemed the fresher for the contrast of her grey-threaded black hair. Always faultlessly dressed, and thoroughly skilled in the art of wearing garments as if they were integral parts of the body, Mrs Storey was altogether an agreeable object upon which to rest the eye.

She was very affable to Blakemore, but with the patronising affability which holds one stationary at the arm's length of friendship, tacitly forbidding a closer intimacy. Had she possessed force of character equal to her reserve of manner, Mrs Storey would have been a remarkable woman. Unfortunately for Florence, Mrs Storey was precisely the sort of woman to whom the responsibility of rearing a daughter should never be confided. Blakemore, divining without analysing her moral and mental deficiencies, saw in her one of those chaperons who shield rather than restrain the impulsive tendencies of a too ardent *protégée*. It was very evident that Florence was quite accustomed to having her own way, notwithstanding the habit of appealing to her mother for approval of an opinion or assent to a plan. The outward flourish of deference was mere diplomacy by which the mother was deceived into the belief that her judgment governed the conduct of the daughter. It was an amusing little comedy, because both the players in it were so earnest in their respective *rôles*, and Blakemore was in doubt whether Florence was not in some measure self-deceived by the filial candour she affected with such address.

"We must apologise to you," Mrs Storey said, "for the absence of Mr Mendenhall, who expected to be of our party. But," turning to Florence, "didn't you arrange that he should join us somewhere or other?"

"It was your own arrangement, mamma. We were to take him up at the Madrid at five o'clock. Don't you think it fascinating at the Madrid?" she asked of Blakemore with an eager smile.

"One sees 'all Paris' there, surely—the good and the bad, democratically mixed," he assented, glancing inquisitively at Mrs Storey.

"That is the charm of it," said Florence. "There is such an exhilarating sense of impropriety in hob-nobbing with 'all Paris,' as you call it. To be in it without exactly being of it—"

"My dear Florence!" expostulated Mrs Storey, "don't give Mr Blakemore the impression that we are frequenters of a place we have visited but once."

"Oh, I assure you, Mrs Storey, to frequent the Madrid is quite a matter of course with the gay world of Paris. Not to be seen there of an afternoon is to lose a day out of the calendar of pleasure."

"Is that your practice?" Florence asked, with a peculiarly expressive glance sideways at him.

"No. Unluckily I have got out of the butterfly and gone back into the grub state. I'm a student, you know."

"And do you stick at it?"

"Yes; hard at it."

"How are you coming on?" asked Mrs Storey, as if persuaded of her qualification to pass judgment on artistic progress.

"Very badly, I'm afraid. Old Monier says my feet look like *gigots*."

"Good heaven! what have your feet to do with painting?" Mrs Storey exclaimed, at the same time taking in the trim set of Blakemore's patent leather boots.

Florence laughed irreverently, making a gesture of despair.

"Mamma! How innocent you are! My mother is a literalist, Walter, so you must be very careful how you talk about spades."

This inadvertent use of his first name was gratifying to Blakemore, who thought it as cordial as it was spontaneous, a chance note from other days that set a whole harmony in vibration. He saw, too, that she was aware of the slip, and he knew that the fictitious formality she had introduced between them was dismissed from that moment. Some minutes later Florence proved the justness of his conclusion by asking of her mother in a tone of surprise, as if but then noting the fact,—

"But why do you address him as 'Mr Blakemore'? That gives us no claim on him whatever; whereas I propose to make very free use of him as long as we stop in Paris. May I not, Walter?"

Mrs Storey was properly vexed. When Florence had announced her intention of writing Blakemore a note of summons, there had been a careful discussion of the relations Mrs Storey would permit. A polite friendliness should instruct the young gentleman how great are the sentimental differences between the two points of a three years' social hiatus.

"Besides," contended the estimable lady with the dogmatism of an experienced campaigner, "nathing could be more *bizarre* than going through the trouble and cost of European culture if you are to end by marrying a provincial nobody."

That Florence should so imprudently set at nought the solemnities of a sage conference was quite enough to justify a rebuke, the right wording of which Mrs Storey was casting about in her mind to find when a servant entered to announce that madame's carriage was in readiness.

The ladies had only to give to hair and toilet those mysterious final pats and thrusts before a mirror, which to the masculine perception are entirely without result, and in ten minutes' time they were seated in the smart carriage, with liveried coachman and footman, which Mrs Storey had hired *ensemble* for the rest of the season.

After a drive of an hour or more, during which joyous excitement Florence had a comforting number of bows from friends and acquaintances, they went to keep their appointment at the Madrid. Mr Mendenhall had been thoughtful enough to reserve a table, at which he sat in isolated sovereignty as they drove up.

Blakemore saw in Mr John Mendenhall an average well-bred English gentleman, some years older than himself, neither more nor less interesting than the majority of his class, such a man as he could denominate "a good fellow," and certainly not more

dull than need be. Indeed, he presently began to suspect the sincerity of Florence's postscript to her note, and to attach some importance to her casual remark in the carriage that Mr Mendenhall had only an old man, an invalid, his uncle, between him and a baronage, so that he was in danger of one day becoming a peer. He thought her far too willing to show this heir-conditional the amiabilities of her temper, and was more annoyed than he should have been when she suddenly asked, with a malicious twinkle, it seemed to him, "Who was the pretty girl to whom you were so devoted at St Cloud the other day? Was that a genuine studio *grisette*?"

"Oh! that genus of *grisettes* has been extinct these many years," he said, conscious of more than a becoming colour in his face, and glad that Mendenhall was talking to Mrs Storey at the moment; "that was Madame Manders."

"Ah!" said Florence, with the air of one having been fully enlightened. "Then that was her little boy with you?"

"Yes, that was Manders."

"Manders! Is that his Christian name?"

"No," he laughed; "his name is Edouard, but his father, who was also an Edward, always called him 'Manders' to prevent confusion in the *ménage*. The name seems to fit him; he is an odd little chap."

"And is Monsieur Manders one of your intimates?"

"I never had the pleasure of knowing Monsieur

Manders. He got through with life before I made the acquaintance of his family."

"A widow, then! that makes it more interesting, doesn't it?"

"I wonder if you are talking of Edward Manders who drowned himself five or six months ago?" asked Mr Mendenhall.

"Drowned himself!" exclaimed Florence. "How romantic! What an uncommonly fortunate fellow you are, Walter!"

"Yes," said Blakemore, answering Mr Mendenhall. "Did you know him?"

"We were at Cambridge together. Poor devil! He went to the dogs in a hurry. One of the sort money ruins, you know. Plenty of good qualities, but no balance. Made a bad go of it over here, and the family shut the doors on him. Took up with a Latin Quarter *danseuse*, or something of the kind —I don't know the particulars—who helped him on his way to the bow-wows."

"You have been misinformed," Blakemore interrupted warmly; "he married a most estimable girl, one worthy of any man's respect."

"Yes, Mr Blakemore knows the widow intimately," Florence explained, smiling significantly at Blakemore.

"Really!" said Mrs Storey, as if she doubted that the intimacy was conclusive proof of the widow's respectability. "I daresay Mr Blakemore has a somewhat general acquaintance."

"Then you know Mrs Manders?" Mr Mendenhall asked, with deferential politeness.

"Quite well," assented Blakemore.

"And she is not what the family believes her to be?"

"She is a thoroughly good woman," said Blakemore, with a dignity that allowed no doubt of his sincerity.

Mr Mendenhall slightly raised his eyebrows in disagreement with the nod of acquiescence he gave to Blakemore's statement as he asked,—

"Don't you think it strange, then, that she should sign a paper declaring that her child had no claim whatever on the Manders family?"

"She signed such a paper?" Blakemore asked incredulously.

"Mark Manders, Ned's younger brother, told me so at the club one night not long afterwards."

"Marie—Madame Manders says her husband's brothers were unkind to her and terrified her. If she signed any such paper—"

"I hardly think they would do anything like that," said Mr Mendenhall, quietly, anticipating Blakemore's accusation and disposing of it.

The check was timely. It brought Blakemore to a consciousness of symptoms of rising temper in his blood, and gave him opportunity to modify his proposed remark.

"I was only going to say," he continued, in matter-of-fact tone, but with a deprecatory look at Florence,

"that if Madame Manders signed such a paper, she did not realise the importance of her act."

"Perhaps," said Mr Mendenhall, shrugging his shoulders. Then he added, looking over his wine glass at Blakemore, and smiling as only worldly-minded men have learned to smile when they speak of indifferent women, "But it really doesn't matter, I suppose. We waste a lot of time with our ridiculous prejudices in this higgledy-piggledy world of ours. Don't you think so, Miss Storey?"

"I can't say," replied that young lady; "I haven't a prejudice of any sort, unless an objection to sitting too long in one place amounts to a prejudice. I should love to walk about a little. Can't we?"

Mr Mendenhall had taken a box for the theatre for that night. Got was to play. Blakemore was persuaded, much too easily, Mrs Storey thought, to join the party after dinner, he having declared it impossible that he should dress and return in time to dine with them.

"You look well enough to come along as you are," Florence had urged. "The French are indifferent to evening dress, you know."

"But I am afraid Mr Mendenhall isn't," Blakemore replied good-humouredly, but quite resolved not to go.

"I confess," Mr Mendenhall admitted smilingly, "that I think a morning coat quite capable of disturbing the unities of a box-party. Still—"

Blakemore found the shaded lamp burning on the table of his salon when he returned to his apart-

ments, the rosy light falling on the white square of a note Marie had left for him. Fanchette came in to direct his attention to it, and to babble her superfluous opinions of the merits of the "très gentille fille" and her "sage petit garçon," who had gone away scarcely half an hour before.

Marie's penmanship did not proclaim an adept in writing, but Blakemore thought the sentiment of the large scrawled words sufficiently excused the want of skill.

"We have been very happy here to-day, only not as happy as we would have been if you had come home to dinner. I put on the yellow gown and sat as I would have sat for you, and Manders looked at me a long time and then he said, 'You are a very pretty maman.' Is he not only a silly little boy? Shall I come to-morrow? or has the nice young lady taken my painter away from me?"

Blakemore folded up the note and put it in his pocket, without exactly knowing why.

CHAPTER VI

Nor only did the work in the little garden suffer many interruptions, but Blakemore's morning absences from the school, or "Academy," as M. Monier preferred to hear it named, began also to be the subject of more or less complimentary gossip. Tom Milsom declared with an affectation of grave solicitude that their fellow student was "going it," an ambiguous judgment, but one to which the others deferred as if "going it" definitely described a catalogued human infirmity. That it was a remediable infirmity they recognised by appointing a committee of remonstrance, with Milsom as chairman, and there was much grave talk directed against the peccant Blakemore during the "rest" in the morning of his next appearance. There was an intimation that continued negligence of the sort complained of might lead to the offender's being hung up and painted, a punitive measure only applied, in the natural order of things, to an objectionable "nouveau." Blakemore did not present the appearance of one greatly intimidated, and there was not that amendment of conduct which argues a penitent spirit. Nor did the negative chidings of Marie, who

asked if it was in any way her fault that the girl in yellow came on so slowly, have a more corrective influence. She came regularly every afternoon at the appointed hour, obedient to a punctilious sense of obligation, though with increasing regularity Fanchette announced,—

"Monsieur will not be here to-day."

Marie was usually accompanied by Manders now. The child, released from scholastic discipline at four o'clock, had begun to have a repugnance to the society of Mother Pugens and the slip-shod girl who came to fetch him from the school. He did not make his objections very clear to Marie, but the fact was Mother Pugens had a fondness for insinuating bits of curious philosophy into her affable chats with Manders, and he got from them an indistinct impression of a skeleton which Mother Pugens supposed Marie to have hidden away somewhere. Her generalisations were tending rapidly toward particulars.

"It's a pity," she said one day, "but you will know sometime, and for my part I think you are old enough to be told now. You will be coming upon the skeleton as a surprise some fine evening, and then what will that silly maman of yours have to say, I should like to know, you poor dear!" Then the good soul patted the child comfortingly on the head and asked, "Hadn't I better tell you, my dear?"

Manders, his eyes more eloquent than his lips, looked frowningly up at her, and declared with

energy, "If you tell me anything my maman won't tell me, I shall hate you!"

But his mind got into troublesome wonderment, nevertheless, and Mother Pugens, whose bon-bons and little cakes one time gave sweetness to her really good-natured countenance, was transformed by degrees into an ogre in Manders' sight, her benevolent smile narrowing into a malignant leer, her terms of endearment becoming abominable seductions. In the degree that the loose-tongued shopwoman diminished in his regard, Marie became more and more the worthy object of his passionate devotion; and when at last she yielded to his entreaties to come to the school for him herself, it only needed that she should make him the companion of her walk to Blakemore's, where he was permitted to make free with the establishment, to fill up and make overflow his liberal cup of happiness. These were pleasant days for Manders, and he did not at all share with Marie her concern for the artistic laxity of the master of the well-appointed rooms and the pleasant garden. Indeed, there was some gain to him from these absences, for Marie, whom Manders *père* had taught some things, made use of the piano and sang little songs with mellow, sweet voice in a way to enchant Manders, whose love of music was not, of course, tinctured by the critical acid. He would lean against the instrument in a position to see her face, and never wearied of listening to her. Sometimes there were tears in his eyes, and he would come nearer to

his mother, stealing an arm about her waist, as if the melody had in it a premonition that the singer would not always be here within hand touch. One song in particular affected him, the air of which was so simple that he had caught it, and he knew without understanding one of the verses that sang itself in his memory often when he lay waiting in his cot for tardy sleep.

> If the light should go and the roses fade,
> And earth grow cold and the birds not sing,
> My heart should not be the least afraid,
> For love of you makes eternal spring!
> But should we miss love, you and I,
> Though death were life my soul would die!

The song was for him, and Marie was the giver of the spring so full of gladness. He dreamed sometimes that they two had lost the love from which life and brightness and happiness arose, and that Marie had gone a long journey in the darkness in quest of it. Waked from sleep by his own sobbing, he would go, trembling with forebodings, to caress with his finger tips the warm cheek of the sleeper, so happily unconscious of his fears. These dreams and peturbations were his own secret, which he never thought of confiding to Marie; but the remembrance of them came vividly into his mind whenever she sang this song, and his arm was put out to keep her from gliding away from him into that desolate and haunted darkness.

The child was so much stronger than the woman.

June was drawing to a close, and the Storeys were preparing to go to Switzerland. Mrs Storey had made many vain flutterings to hasten the departure. Her reason for such eagerness to quit a scene in which she found the fullest gratification of what she was pleased to term her hedonic tastes, was expressed in a contemptuous paragraph in one of her letters to Mr Storey. "Florence is irritating the life out of me. The girl has your vulgar want of decent ambition, and persists in fooling away her time and opportunities with this stupid Walter Blakemore, who seems more drearily commonplace than ever. She has picked up some of your prattle about men who achieve their own distinction, and talks of Blakemore's artistic genius as if a mere picture painter could ever compare with an hereditary peer of England—for I have told you that Mr Mendenhall is entitled, or some day will be entitled, to sit in the House of Lords. I suppose you cannot see any choice between plain *Mrs* and LADY, but that is only because you haven't an idea beyond the balancing of your ledger. Mr Mendenhall will go to Geneva with us if I can ever bring Florence to be reasonable enough to let her trunks be packed, but she is now gushing Blakemore's idiocy about the charms of Paris in July! At the same time I do not believe she cares a row of pins for Blakemore. And I can't see why she should."

Florence and Blakemore seemed to have arrived at a contrary conclusion in the course of the three

weeks in which the young lady had contrived, despite a great amount of social excitement, more than once to make excursions of a restful character in Blakemore's company free from the maternal surveillance. It is true these fruitful escapades were masked by the pretence of shopping, devotional pilgrimages, or any easy deception that would serve to answer Mrs Storey's unsuspicious and too careless questions, but subtleties of this sort are elementary to forbidden friendships. The ethics of the situation did not trouble Blakemore, for the simple reason that they did not occur to him, it being his opinion that Mrs Storey was one of those irreconcilable dogmatists in the friendships of the sexes whom it is the duty of every purposeful young gentleman to oppose with artifice. Florence was equally free from pricks of conscience. The deceptions she practised upon her mother were, she thought, no more than the necessary diplomacies of a girl whose rightful independence of thought and action was capriciously abridged. She knew herself perfectly capable of governing her own conduct within the limits of discretion as she understood discretion, and did not admit the right of foreign prejudices to place a fretful restraint upon the "sensible liberties of our American system, which recognises woman as an intelligent and responsible being."

Their first adventure together was a drive to one of the environs, to which the greater part of the day was devoted. When Florence proposed it, Blakemore,

with a momentary deference to Parisian convention, was for taking Mrs Storey with them.

"Nonsense!" Florence replied, with an emphasis that made Blakemore ashamed of his nice scruples. "I hate being chaperoned as if I were an invalid or an idiot. I think there is nothing so immoral as this odious European custom of branding every girl as a creature not fit to be trusted alone. Propriety? There is no propriety about it; it is downright indecency. It is an advertisement of society's belief that a girl between the age of fifteen and matrimony is a natural reprobate longing for an abyss in which to fling herself. It is detestable. It makes my blood boil. I won't submit to it. There is nothing would send me to Old Nick faster than a chaperon continually prodding me in the back with maxims. If you have any wish to see me lead a respectable life, do help me to preserve my independence."

Assaulted in this determined fashion, Blakemore's argumentative barriers were beaten into particles, and he made an unconditional surrender to every sprightly whim of a girl whose self-assured spirit had in it so many elements of dangerous fascination. Further experience convinced him that Florence had made a sufficiently thorough diagnosis of the half-dozen motives to human conduct to be fortified against surprise in any direction, and that the course of action to which she might commit herself would be deliberately chosen. The question he began to ask himself was whether her choice would be love or

ambition; and the egotism which is the reservoir of energy in every healthy mind determined him to educate her choice favourably to himself. He became so much engrossed in the self-imposed tutorage that he was not aware of the extent of Florence's invasion of his own reserve until it was nearly time to return to the Avenue Marceau from the last of their stolen outings. Then he learned from the turbulence in his breast how recklessly he had played the pedagogue without taking account of the progress of his pupil.

They were sitting on a bench below the fortifications at the edge of the Bois de Vincennes, that grandfather of the parks of Paris so dear to the *bourgeoisie* and the holiday rabble. They had spent the morning on the banks of the Marne, one of the loveliest and most capricious rivers of France, where, in the soft days of the young summer, the artists and the dreamers went to find ravishing bits of shade and colour as they lounged on the turf beneath trees that overhung the water, busy mills, picturesque farmhouses, cosy vine-embowered cottages, and even a shepherdess here and there to quicken the scene that lends itself so charmingly to romance. They had rambled about and through the old château, now a garrison, in which the ghosts of royal history still keep their revels or repeat to the imagination the grim terrors of old tragedies like that of the Duc d'Enghien, fusilladed in the dry moat; they had strolled along the little paths like aisles in the forest, once the haunt of deer and the wild boar preserved

for the royal hunt, but now effeminated to childish recreations and promenades of the careless; and they had come, on their way to the stand of the *voitures*, to this isolated rustic bench with just a ribbon of sunlight in the branches above it.

"And this is our last day together—alone?" asked Blakemore, as if there were any doubt of the fact.

"Unless you make up your mind to go to Switzerland with us," she answered, her smile having something of a challenge in it.

"I can't do that."

"No?"

"No. I'm not a gentleman of leisure like Mr Mendenhall."

"Really? I have seen no evidence to the contrary."

"Ah! That is true. You have made an idler of me."

"And you reproach me for it. That's a man's way."

"You know what I think about it. You know what these days with you have meant to me. You know what your going away means to me." He took her hand as he spoke, but she laughingly drew it away and checked his movement toward her with an admonitory shake of the head.

"Now, you must not spoil the day by a splash of personal sentiment. I don't want you to say something that will sound foolish to you when you recall it after I am gone. You have kept your head so well

in our little jaunts and frolics that I have quite a good opinion of your common sense. But what shall I think of you if you do as all the rest of them do?"

"But I am in earnest, Florence!"

"So am I, Walter, as I shall prove to you by talking with what the story books would call unmaidenly frankness. You think you love me, don't you?"

"I don't think it, I know it," he answered ardently, and seizing once more upon her hand, this time in a more secure grasp.

"Very well, then, you know it," she assented, making no effort to release her hand nor to prevent his kissing it. "Now, then, let us see what would be the consequences of a corresponding weakness on my part. You are an artist at the beginning of a career—"

"I'm a duffer with no prospect of a career," he interrupted, promptly pushing aside the first obstacle.

"And do you think I would marry a 'duffer'?" she asked mischievously. "But you are not a 'duffer,' and I am sure you have all the requisites of success, if you don't make a fool of yourself by marrying some girl without an atom of sympathy in her make-up, and who would lead you a dance of despair."

"You are not that sort of girl," he urged stoutly.

"But you have no business to marry at all," she insisted, "until you have got up the hill where you won't mind a weight being hung round your neck.

Besides, I am not ready to think of becoming a bond-slave to a man yet—of being labelled as someone's private property from which trespassers are warned. That amuses you, doesn't it? Then I must tell you cold-bloodedly that the man I will consent to marry must offer me a substantial equivalent for my liberty. Love isn't enough. That is the cheapest merchandise in the market. Money is but a little more considerable, for a very rich man may be a mere beast; besides, I shall have plenty of money. I should hesitate a long time before refusing a sounding title provided the creature that went with it were not intolerably odious. If it were a choice between these three things only I might be persuaded to make n initial experiment in love. But there is another consideration greater than these that I think embraces them all—I mean Fame, real fame, fame gained by the patient exercise of a commanding talent. I could adore a great man; I haven't much use for the other kind."

She said all this so good-humouredly that Blakemore was not dismayed by it. It rather gave him courage to set himself before her in the favourable light of one not unlikely to meet her requirements if she would give him time and a sustaining promise. Men became, he declared with unreasoning enthusiasm, whatever women chose to make of them, so great was man's need of an inspiring motive such as love for woman alone could give him. She listened to his ardent and insistent eloquence,

smiling to note the increased confidence with which he rounded each uninterrupted period, but giving no sign that his words were other than vain beatings at her ears. He imagined that he had routed her pretended objections, and interpreted her silence to suit his wishes, and was already beginning to have a sense of possession, when she said naïvely,—

"These seem to be very well-rehearsed ideas of yours; are you sure I am the first one to whom you have addressed this persuasive speech? I wouldn't be at all surprised if you had practised on that pretty Madame Manders. Confess, now."

"Be serious, Florence; don't torment a fellow. Give me an honest answer. Will you?"

"Yes, the honestest I have at hand. I like you as well as I like any man I know, perhaps a little better. I have let you buy me a lot of presents that I didn't really want, and only one of two things could be inferred from that under ordinary conditions, either that I am your fiancée, or that I am a girl without—well, say principle. Now, I am neither the one nor the other—I am simply a young lady who claims the privilege of acting in accordance with her own ideas of right and wrong, and without caring a great deal for any notions Mrs Grundy may have on the subject. I meant pretty nearly all I said a while ago, but there is a modification or two. Perhaps if I were to fall in love with a man I should not stop to consider whether he were a fishmonger

or a maharajah, but would marry him at the first asking. But I'm not in love, and I don't even recognise any symptomatic tendencies in that direction. Wait, wait, wait! I'll make a bargain with you. Why, you looked as if you were going into a temper! I'll make this bargain with you; we will go our respective ways in a two years' further experiment with life. If in the course of that time I get into an entanglement with anybody else, I'll send these presents back to you; if you find that your affection for me is merely a midsummer madness, and Paris madness at that, you will demand the return of your property; but if at the end of the two years we are still freebooters—well, we will meet somewhere and have another talk on this subject. Do you agree?"

He laughed a little dubiously, having less assurance than before, and not quite certain just how he should understand the unorthodox utterance of this girl of twenty who talked like a disappointed widow. He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a tiny morocco case.

"I'll agree if you will wear an engagement ring I have here."

"So you came prepared? You did take me for granted, didn't you? You are a veritable country swain, an Augusta Evans sort of youth. Let me see it."

He opened the case and handed her the ring. She took it with an exclamation of pleasure.

"I approve your taste. It is very pretty—rich but not showy. Well, I'll wear it if you want me to—but not as an engagement ring. I detest engagements; they are too much like paying a deposit on goods to be called for. I don't propose to give you or anyone the right to tyrannise over my conduct. Shall I wear it under those conditions?"

"Under any conditions you please."

"It means absolutely nothing in the way of an engagement?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"You would have no right to complain if I should marry Mr Mendenhall next week?"

"None whatever."

"Then I'll put it on. Of course I allow you the same freedom that I claim for myself."

"Naturally."

There was a pause of some moments, Florence rearranging her rings to give the new one a becoming place, Blakemore nervously revolving an idea he thought appropriate to the occasion.

At last he said hesitatingly,—

"There is generally a seal put upon a ceremony of this kind."

"But, my dear Walter, we have distinctly declared that there is no ceremony about it." She resolutely shook her head. "Come, the sun has gone down; I'll barely get home in time to dress for dinner."

She rose as she spoke. Blakemore sprang to his feet. There was no one in view. He clasped her

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passionately in his arms and kissed her full on the lips.

"Well, you *are* impulsive!" she exclaimed, surprised by the suddenness of the attack, and pushing him from her. "And really, do you know, I hadn't noticed before that you have raised a moustache? It's rather becoming."

She stood regarding him at arm's length for a moment, the amused smile on her lips taking the shadow of a seriousness in her eyes.

"But a moustache is supposed to be a certificate that one has attained years of discretion, and I must request you to play no more schoolboy pranks with me. I think I rather admire reserve in a man. Keep your impulses from getting the better of you. You might fall out of my favour. There is an empty cab crawling along the road; shall we take it?"

CHAPTER VII

AFTER the departure of the Storeys, accompanied by Mr Mendenhall, Blakemore very gladly withdrew from the social dissipations of which he had been the too willing victim, vigorously declining the invitations, still numerous enough notwithstanding the end of the fashionable season. He applied himself to work with a diligence, both in the school and in the garden, that promised to make up the lost time. Not only increased zeal, but a new spirit also animated him. All the perplexities, the hindrances, the obtuseness of his three years persistence in the Monier academy suddenly resolved themselves into nothingness, leaving him clear-visioned, perceptive, competently executive. The sureness with which he now applied principles which M. Monier had despaired of teaching him gave the master a gratifying surprise, and bewildered the students, who knew so much less of these instant awakenings than did the old master, who had seen genius break its shell of dulness before this. Milsom, in his irreverent way explaining the phenomenon in Blakemore's absence, declared—

"The cuss hasn't been loafing as we thought; he has been sneaking it in some other school."

"That is true," said old M. Monier, with a chuckle; "the school of hearts."

But M. Monier was thinking of Marie.

Marie made no attempt to conceal the delight with which the change in Blakemore filled her. She knew well enough to what it was attributable, and was grateful to the American girl; it made small difference to her what had brought about a result so admirable. She was conscious of no other feeling than sincere pleasure that the "creation" was going on, going on well, and that Blakemore was getting the habit of humming fragments of song by way of approving his work when he paused to inspect it. Her heart sang songs, too, and she accounted to herself for these bubblings of happiness by saying, "He is going to arrive some day. He is going to be a great artist after all. And I, too, am helping him!" Manders came in for his share of her raptures—raptures that demanded an outward expansion.

"You like M .Blakemore very, very much, do you not, *cheri?*"

"Yes, I like M. Bla'mo'. But I call him M. Walter, now."

"And you are right, *cheri*," hugging him as if by that means to confirm the privilege; "and M. Walter is so much nicer than M. Blakemore, eh, *mon enfant?*"

"It is easier to say," assented Manders, unemotionally.

"But you like M. Walter himself more than you used to like M. Blakemore, do you not?"

"You are a funny maman, I think. Don't you know it is the same thing? M. Walter and M. Bla'mo' are both one; how am I able to like one better than the other?"

No cleverness of speech could have amused her more. Manders was laughing at her, she saw plainly. She had learned to interpret that extra stolidity of countenance with which he masked his lapses into humorousness. But she liked being laughed at by Manders. She thought it so wise in him.

"You are right; how, indeed!"

She gave him a final caress, that ended in a playful pull at his ear and a ruffling of his curls, for Marie had no doubt whatever of the nature of Manders' feeling for Blakemore. If she had only understood herself half as well, she might have distrusted this exuberance of happiness. There is nothing quite so dangerous among the casualties of life as the careless joy of a generous heart. Selfishness is the moral preservative. Marie had not enough selfishness for the simplest demands of self-protection where her affections were engaged. And what matter? After all, we aphides on the leaves of time vex our precious brains overmuch with the machinery of the universe, which goes on grinding planets to powder, mindless to the fact that a myriad of us perish with every throb

of the stupendous engines. What if an aphis find the tip of a rose leaf sweetened in the sun a whole world of contentment? Why should the aphis quarrel with the stars? Better to go on drinking the refreshing juices of the plant while the sun permits it to be green. That would have been Marie's conclusion if she had thought about the problem at all.

Stopping to dine with Blakemore was becoming the evening habit of Marie and Manders now. Sometimes after the dinner there was music, for Blakemore was a virtuoso of the 'cello, and under his instruction Marie began to play accompaniments with a fair degree of merit in the performance. They sang together also, and whether they played or sang, Manders would sit in rapt attention, his fancies bearing him into such far reaches of wonder-glowing regions that the sudden coming back when the music ceased was a pain to him, and he took tears with him into the street for the home-going. Under these influences, Manders began a curious development, a nervous quickening which both Marie and Blakemore set down to the credit of his mornings in the Ecole Alsacienne. "He is learning rapidly," they said, but the knowledge coming to him was not of the things gathered drily into school-books. There are other islands than Patmos, and other seers than John, and the heavens may part as a scroll that is rolled together for the eyes of a little child. What else meant that confession to Marie as they walked home

one night when she teased him affectionately about his tears and his silence? What was the matter? she asked. Should they have no more of the music that disturbed him so much?

He answered her almost fiercely, vehemently protesting against what he declared to be a wicked, wicked thought. He frightened her with the passionate incoherence of his rebellion against the idea she had playfully suggested. She soothed him with genuine penitence, and with the ardour of her own sympathies coaxed him into confidences that much perplexed her. He talked excitedly, with an astonishing flow of words, gesticulating in a way unusual with him, finally pushing her toward a bench on which they sat in the starlight as he continued impetuously,—

"Do you know where I was to-night? In a great house filled with ever so many people, more than I ever saw before! Lights brighter than that," pointing to a street light, "everywhere! And the people were wonderfully dressed—all white and shining, and so happy! And I was on a great platform in a sort of room all alone! But I wasn't little, I was a man, and I was singing, and there were men down below me playing on all kinds of instruments such as you never saw! And while I was singing the music stopped and a great noise arose, all the people in the crowd making it with their hands and their voices! and all of them looking at me and smiling! but some of them were crying, too. They made so much noise

that I stopped singing, for I couldn't hear myself singing! and then—and then the lights all went out! Ah! why did the lights go out to leave me sitting in M. Walter's room crying?"

A superstitious awe came upon Marie with the recital. She could only murmur some words of endearment and hurry Manders home, comforting him with the repeated assurance that she was a very naughty maman to have teased him.

She faithfully reported the incident to Blakemore the next afternoon, adding, in a flutter of eagerness, to convince him that it was all very curious,—

"And you know he has never been in a theatre, so he was not remembering something he had seen really!"

"I'll tell you what we'll have to do, Marie, we'll have to teach Manders music. He has it in him; we'll bring it out."

Marie put out her hand gratefully, with the light laughter of a gratified child, exclaiming,—

"How good you are, Walter! You are like the fairies who bring the flowers and the sunshine and the soft rains—you make everyone happy." Then after a moment her face clouded. "But I don't know enough to teach him, and you cannot spare the time."

"Never mind," he answered, striking his finger lightly against her dimpled chin, "he shall have a

teacher who shall come here while you are posing, and we'll take an hour of playtime away from him. He won't mind that."

"Oh! he will be so happy! and I—I'll be so happy, too!"

CHAPTER VIII

BLAKEMORE, having made careful inquiry among his friends, got the address of a Miss Warley, the daughter of an English officer retired on half-pay who had come with his family to live in Paris for economic reasons. He had a son at Harrow, and the daughter, recommended as a thorough musician, helped out the slender resources by giving a few lessons in a strictly private way. Miss Warley called by appointment at Blakemore's apartments, accompanied by the captain—an unwarlike, amiable gentleman, who was at nice pains to impress Blakemore with the fact that the necessity to earn one's daily bread was not incompatible with gentility and the traditions of a family that had excellent reasons for holding its head respectably high. He made leading inquiries about the prospective pupil, and in answer to one of these Blakemore betrayed the fact that Madame Manders was a professional model.

Instantly, as if operated by a common spring, the captain and Miss Warley rose to their feet, their affable smiles disappearing behind an aspect of offended yet polite dignity.

"In that case—" the captain began, giving his

cane a definitive thrust against the floor, at the same time crooking his elbow in a formal invitation to the cotton-gloved hand of his daughter, "I think we need take up no more of your time, sir."

Blakemore hastened to interpose some pacifying explanations. Madame Manders was a woman of the most exemplary character, and not at all a model in the ordinary sense of the word. Besides, the captain doubtless knew the family to which Madame Manders had the honour to belong, as it was the venerable and aristocratic Kentish family whose great wealth was its least proud distinction. It was true that the late Mr Edward Manders had fallen under the disfavour of his family and died estranged from them, but that did not in the least detract from the respectability of his son. As for Madame Manders herself, "You yourself said but a moment ago, Captain Warley, that the necessity of earning one's livelihood is not incompatible with gentility. Madame Manders follows honourably an honourable vocation, a necessary vocation if art is to have its noblest expression; and I think, sir, we owe it to art and humanity to make the profession of the model as respectable at least as the models themselves are willing to have it."

Captain Warley and his daughter exchanged glances. The captain cleared his throat and released a button of his coat. Miss Warley withdrew her hand from her father's arm. There was a moment of silence, during which Blakemore stood expectant.

"Well, Captain Warley?"

"Well, daughter?" asked the captain, a little doubtfully.

"As you please, father," replied the young lady, with the air of one resigned to an alternative. Blakemore thought Miss Warley of an age and a plainness quite equal to the guardianship of her austere virtue.

"Well, my dear, perhaps Mr Blakemore is right. There is no reason why we should not be as charitable as our neighbours, and I daresay the boy will not be any the less musical because his mother is a model. We may as well make the experiment."

So the music lessons began, Miss Warley coming three times a week, to the intense happiness of the eager Manders, and presently to her own satisfaction, for she told her father that the boy was a prodigy so easy to teach that he even anticipated instruction.

The summer passed, and the autumn was drifting away from its purple and golden-leafed splendour into the grey nakedness of the early winter. Blakemore was well along with his second picture, one he intended to submit to the next year's salon, it offered so much in character and "quality." Letters from Miss Storey in St Petersburg announced the intention of Mrs Storey to pass the winter in Rome and the southern parts of Italy, and Blakemore had in mind a plan to join them to make some study of the Italian masters as the final throwing off of the student's *beret* before entering formally the respon-

sible life of the veritable artist. Manders had already advanced to the triumphant stage of "reading music," though Miss Warley, with a sensibleness not common to her class, bewailed the fact that she could not "keep him back enough. He reads so well that he wants to go at pieces I am not ready to have him take." And she distressed herself, too, over the passion he had for singing.

"But he has a sweet voice," Blakemore laughingly objected. "I love to hear it."

"Of course you do," Miss Warley assented, in the tone she would have used to rebuke a misdemeanour. "And so do I. That is the very reason he should not be allowed to open his mouth for at least ten years."

But he only sang the songs Marie was used to sing, little songs a linnet might have piped from the hedge; and most of all the one he wept to hear when it first came to him in his mother's winningly melodious but untrained voice,—

> If the light should go and the roses fade,
> And earth grow cold and the birds not sing.

But Marie had never sung it so. Marie's soul only sunned itself in the shallows of emotion.

One day Manders came listless from the school to his music lesson. He sat inert at the piano, going through his task in such a lifeless, perfunctory way that Miss Warley chided him rather sharply for an indolence that surprised her. Blakemore, painting

in the garden, was saying to Marie, "A few more days and we'll call this done," Marie smiling content, when Miss Warley came to the salon door and called to Blakemore.

"I'm afraid Manders is going to be ill," she said anxiously, as Blakemore came to her. Marie heard, her heart bounding with a great fear as she ran forward, white-faced and trembling. She was beside the corner divan, where Manders lay with closed eyes, before the others. She took his hands, covering them and his cheeks with kisses as she breathed out her fearful endearments, blaming him for trying to frighten her. Manders smiled, and put his arm about her neck.

"I'm just sleepy, maman; that is all," he said.

But it was not all, as the doctor, who came an hour later, told them. "Typhus,' he said to Blakemore, and forbade the child's removal from the house. Blakemore gave up his own room, a large and airy one, to Manders and Marie, and prepared, with Fanchette's help, a *sommier* for himself in the studio. After a night or two a nurse came in, and the dressing-room was made to serve Marie's purpose, the door opening into the room where Manders burned in his music-haunted delirium.

Mother Pugens brought such things as were required from Marie's rooms in the Rue St Jacques, and evinced so great a solicitude to be helpful that now and then she was allowed to sit in the sick-room for an hour or two, watching and serving the "pauvre

petit" she had brought into the world, as she assured the nurse a thousand times.

The case did not turn out as bad as the doctor feared it would.

"It is only typhoid," he cheerily informed Blakemore one morning, without making it clear just how many degrees of favourable difference were reckoned between a disease and its likeness, but his tone and manner persuaded Blakemore that the difference was worth a thank-offering. And Manders, too, was a stout lad, showing, with his curls shorn away, even manlier on his pillow than he had in the activities of health, so that there was a visible something to substantiate the medical man's opinion that the lad would be "pulled through with colours flying."

Pull him through they did, though they were five weeks in the doing. There were dancing feathers of snow in the keen air when Manders—the nurse and the doctor dismissed a week before—came down into the warm, fire-flushed salon for the first afternoon jubilee over his convalescence. Manders was enthroned upon cushions, and from every advantageous place and corner fresh flowers and green plants sent him greetings, to which his smiles made answer. A merry-making, indeed, with Miss Warley and the captain coming in for a part of it.

"I should have brought Mrs Warley along," said the captain, semi-confidentially, to Blakemore, "but

really she wasn't equal to the exertion." Then, in a lower tone still, he added, "Peculiar woman, Mrs Warley; most estimable, but peculiar. Proud, Mr Blakemore, proud as Lucifer. It is style or nothing with Mrs Warley, so we quit London to live among these jabbering barbarians for pride's sake, Mr Blakemore. Ah! well, sir, a man who has been one of Her Majesty's officers owes something to his family. Sacrifices are salt for the best of us, Mr Blakemore—but one doesn't want to become too salty."

The captain laughed heartily at this little joke. It was a favourite with him, because it always sent his spirit up where numberless good things were stored for repetition; and once well started, the captain was no end of a jolly fellow. Manders found him immensely amusing, he had so many droll stories of army life, of which he made himself the victim. Anecdotes at the expense of the narrator are so much more comical than others, that the captain did not hesitate to reverse the order of facts if by so doing he could produce a more resonant explosion of mirth. Manders rewarded the captain prodigally, and the others were so ready with their small pence of chuckles and titterings that the sunny old war-dog was encouraged to monopolise the occasion, and was inclined to resent it as an infringement of personal privilege when Miss Warley arose with the remark that it was time for them to go. He flourished his hand with an airy gaiety and declared there was plenty of time, protesting that his best stories were

to come. He was willing to accept Blakemore's invitation to dinner.

"You know what mother will say if we are late to our dinner," Miss Warley reminded him, smiling, and giving an eloquent side inclination to her head.

"Ah! Mr Blakemore," said the captain, in mock dolour as he reluctantly got to his feet, "I used to be foolish enough to pity a galley slave. But being chained to the rowlocks is freedom—freedom, Mr Blakemore—compared with the tyranny of a six-o'clock dinner, served in one course. Well, come along, Matilda, since we must be slaves."

Though he felt some slight reaction after the captain had gone, Manders was by no means ready to retire to his room. He insisted on having his light dinner at the table with Blakemore and Marie, and afterward there must be some music, it had been so long since he had heard any. When at last he confessed himself tired and sleepy, Blakemore carried him up the few steps that led to the half floor where were the studio and sleeping-rooms, and Marie put him to bed.

"Don't stop the music," he pleaded, after he had been tucked into his bed. "I should love to go to sleep with the music in my ears."

Fanchette closed up the house and went up to her place in the attic while they were playing and singing together. Some strange spell was in the music to-night. There were whispers and touches and soft, seductive laughter in the air, a mysterious

breath from the flowers, and an eerie murmur in mischievous winds beating lightly at the casements. Once Marie looked from the piano at Blakemore, who was playing the 'cello absently, his eyes intently fixed on her.

"You are not playing in time with me," she said laughingly.

"I wasn't thinking," said Blakemore, hurriedly, drawing the 'cello closer between his knees. "Let us begin again."

She turned back a page, and felt her cheeks flush, wondering what caused it; and her fingers seemed to touch the keys tremulously as she played, faltering presently and striking false notes. She stopped at length, saying, as she smiled half-apologetically, half-shyly,—

"I don't believe I can play any more."

"You are tired," he said, placing the 'cello in the corner against the piano.

"No, I don't feel tired," she answered.

"Nervous, perhaps."

"You know I haven't any nerves," she smiled. "I think it is happiness. Happiness is very disturbing sometimes, isn't it?"

"Yes," he assented, something like a sigh in his voice, yet something of eagerness too. "There is nothing so disturbing as happiness, sometimes. Why do you feel so happy?"

"Because Manders is well again, I suppose. Doesn't that make you happy too?"

"Yes, that makes me happy too."

He stood beside her. A lock of her hair, slipped from the coil, curled forward along her neck. He took it between his fingers, but with a little laugh she pulled away from him and tucked it in place again, saying that was a sign of bedtime. It seemed to him that she had never been so pretty.

"Isn't it getting late?" she asked.

"Not yet eleven," he answered, looking at his watch.

"Oh! but that is late for us, nowadays, you know."

They lighted their candles and turned out the salon lights, going up the steps together. He went in with her to look at Manders, who slept soundly, a smile on his lips, one hand just above the cover holding the rose he had taken to bed with him.

They stood regarding the child for a moment, Blakemore with his hand on Marie's shoulder. She looked up into the face above her, whispering,—

"Is he not beautiful?"

Blakemore drew her a little toward the door, then paused irresolutely. He held out his hand to her.

"Good-night!" he said, in a low tone.

"Good-night!" she responded, putting her hand in his. He held her hand, making no movement to go. His clasp seemed feverish to her. She looked at him inquiringly. He was strange to her to-night.

"What is it?" she asked.

He made no response, but, still holding her hand, he led the way across the hall to the studio door. He paused after taking hold of the knob.

"Are you sleepy?" he asked, as if seeking an excuse for himself.

"No," she said. "Why? Are you going to work at this hour?"

"No; I want to talk to you," he said heavily.

They entered the studio, he closing the door behind them.

An hour later Manders cried out in his sleep—a cry of terror.

"Maman!"

Marie heard him, and, frightened, came running from the studio, a robe caught hastily around her shoulders.

She flung herself upon her knees at the bedside of the sleeping child, her tears raining upon his face.

"Oh, forgive me, Edouard, my little one! Forgive me! forgive me!" she sobbed, reaching to press his cheek with her hand. The child awoke, knew her, and put out an arm to clasp her neck.

"Oh, maman," he exclaimed, "I have had such a dream! A great river was bearing you away from me—a great, swift river, and you were in the midst of it! But I ran along on the side calling to you, and I knew you must hear me and come back! It was a foolish dream, was it not, maman?"

But Marie wept for the realness of the dream.

CHAPTER IX

BLAKEMORE came down to his coffee in a travelling suit next morning, and bearing a hand-bag.

"Is monsieur going away?" asked Fanchette, marked disapproval in her tone. She was accustomed to forewarning of these goings, and she thought coffee and rolls an insufficient foundation for a railway journey, however short.

"Yes; I am going to London for three or four days. Send the *concierge* for a *fiacre*."

"But shall I fry an egg for monsieur? or make an omelette? It is very indiscreet to tempt Providence with an empty stomach when one journeys by train, but to go to sea that way is unheard of, monsieur."

"I shall breakfast at Calais, Fanchette. I want nothing now."

Fanchette started, grumbling, toward the door to order the cab. As she was going out, Blakemore called to her,—

"Have you seen madame this morning?"

"In her room, monsieur. She had me serve her coffee there." Then, coming nearer to him and speaking in a tone of querulous concern, she added,—

"I don't believe the poor dear remembered to put herself to bed at all last night. Her bed had not been touched, and I found her on the floor with her head on the little one's bed. It is all very well, monsieur, for mothers to be happy when their little ones get well after a battle with death, but when it comes to—"

"Never mind, Fanchette, do as I bade you."

Fanchette became suspicious of her ears. It was something new for Monsieur Blakemore to speak irritably—but to lapse from compassion at the same time! The old domestic stared at him. She had not heard aright.

"Monsieur has said—?"

"Send the *concierge* for the *fiacre*."

Fanchette went out bewildered.

When, at the end of a quarter of an hour, she returned, to say that the cab was waiting, Blakemore handed her a note.

"Give that to madame," he said, rather more gently than he had spoken before, Fanchette thought, "and you are to take orders from her in my absence. I'll be back before the end of the week."

He went out, carrying the bag, and Fanchette followed him to the pavement, vainly ransacking her feeble old brain for some reasonable explanation of the master's unwonted behaviour.

Marie kept her room until the afternoon and then came down into the salon with Manders, and seemed to cling to the child as if she were the one in need of comforting and reviving attention. She demanded

of the child a thousand reassurances of his love for her. She seemed fearful of being a moment beyond touch of him, and if he fell into one of the grave reveries so habitual with him, she interpreted his silence into a reproach, and with an extravagance of half-tearful follies won him back to babbling tenderness. When he stroked his hand over her face and called her "good little maman" in a quaintly patronising way, she overwhelmed him with grateful caresses, smiling at him through tears that she told him were only the words of happiness which her tongue didn't know how to speak.

"My heart is so full, Edouard, that it would burst if I couldn't cry a little—full of love for you, dearie! There isn't anything there but love, dearie! There isn't room for anything else. You couldn't think me wicked, could you, little one? You wouldn't believe that I could be wicked! Eh, my child? You couldn't believe it if I should tell you so myself! Could you, dearie? Could you, could you, little one?"

He laughed, and struck her cheek with his open hand, playfully punishing her.

"Que tu es bête!" was his reply. "One must not cry when one is happy; that is for the sad to do. I will not have my pretty maman's eyes like fish ponds." He dried away her tears with the ends of the silk scarf loosely knotted at her throat, amused by the performance, telling her it served her right if he had spoiled her finery.

He wished her to sing for him. Not to-day, she said. And so the next day, and the day following, and the day after that. Then a letter came for Blakemore, postmarked Florence, the superscription having that angular irregularity which Marie had already learned to identify with Miss Storey's writing. Several letters addressed in this way had come in the course of the past six months, one or two while Manders was ill, and Marie had felt no sort of interest in them, save for the pleasure Blakemore seemed to get from reading them. But she held this one long in her hand, her eyes studying the address through a mist of tears, as if some vital import were in each separate letter. She put it on the table at last, address downward, and placed beside it a small vase, in the slender stem of which she put a single rose, choosing a white one. She brushed the mist from her eyes with her finger tips, and though a sigh trembled from her lips, a smile that was hardly a smile came with it. Manders was half lying on the divan, looking at the pictures of a comic paper Miss Warley had brought him. Marie went to him, and pulling down the paper behind which his face was hidden, smiled at him.

"Shall I sing for you now?" she asked.

"Will you?" cried Manders, springing up.

"Yes."

She kissed him, but not in the impassioned way of these past few days, and went to the piano. Manders was too pleased to notice that there was something

new, something strangely prophetic in the firmer tones of her voice to-night.

"You are the old maman again," he said approvingly, as they went up the stairs to bed. She made no response, knowing it otherwise.

"Sit down by me," he urged, after he had got into bed. "I want to tell you something."

She complied, sitting on the edge of the bed, holding one of his hands in hers.

"Do you know what I was thinking while you were singing? That is what I am going to tell you; but I'm sure I can't tell you as it was. Isn't it droll that you think so many things that you don't know how to say? It isn't because I am little, is it? You think things that way, too, don't you, maman? I knew you did. I suppose God makes it that way on purpose. Don't you? Well, I was thinking that there was a little bird singing in a cage with the door open. And the little bird, singing all the time, would hop down to the door of its cage, and sit on the place that goes across under the door, you know, but it wouldn't go out of the cage, though the trees were just beyond, with other birds calling among the branches. When I was listening I knew what the bird was singing, but I don't remember it now. That is very funny, too, for I thought all the time how interesting it was. By-and-by the little bird went back to the swinging ring in the top of its cage, and then someone came and held up his hand before the door of the cage and coaxed the bird. But it went on singing and

didn't come down. Then the hand reached into the cage and took the bird, very gently. But it frightened the bird so that it stopped singing and crouched down in the hand, trembling, and with its mouth open. The hand held the bird for a long time; and the man talked to the bird, and put it against his cheek, and closed its little mouth with his lips, and the bird stopped trembling and was very still. Then the hand put the bird back into the cage, but it didn't sing; it just tucked its head down into its feathers, and sat still, very still. And do you know what I was thinking? I was thinking what a pity it would be if the little bird never sang again. Don't you think it would be a pity?"

"Yes, it would be a pity, dearie. I am sure the little bird will sing again. It will not do for the birds to stop singing; the world needs all its music. Sleep, dearie, and dream that the little bird has sung."

In the morning there was a telegram from Blakemore, answer paid; it asked the simple question,—

"Shall we go on with the picture?"

Marie answered, "Yes."

But after Fanchette had gone to the bureau with the message, Marie went up to her room and began getting Manders's and her things in readiness to be carried back to the Rue St Jacques. Manders came in when the work was nearly done.

"What are you doing?" he asked, a look of dismay coming into his face, for he saw very well what was doing.

"Getting ready to go home," she replied cheerily. "Won't you be glad to be in our own little place again?"

"No," he answered conclusively, "I am not ready to go. I like it better here; besides, I'm not all well yet, and I need the piano."

Marie argued with him, using as persuasive allies of her imperfect reasoning a world of blandishments and caresses, for Manders was obstinately opposed to a course that seemed to him much too capricious. To her suggestion that they had no right to impose on Mr Blakemore's kindness now that Manders was quite able to be about again, the lad retorted with liveliness,—

"M. Walter likes us very much. He likes to have us here; and it isn't right to go away and leave him when he isn't here."

For a moment she hesitated, he was so deeply disturbed by the thought of quitting surroundings so much more delightful than any he remembered to have known. After all, was not her cup in the child's hands? Should she not drink of its waters for his sake, be they sweet or bitter to the taste? Was not his happiness and well-being to be her chief consideration? She had a dim perception of self-surrender as the victory of maternity, even if it had to do with sackcloth and ashes. There might have been an end to the packing, for she was saying to herself, "It would be for Edouard's sake. I must not take anything away from him." But Manders,

thinking he had triumphed over her, that she yielded to his will as always she had yielded, put his arm about her neck and said with quaintly patronising playfulness,—

"And you want to stay, too, don't you? For you love M. Walter just as much as I do,—is it not so, pretty maman?"

She took his face between her two hands, looking into his eyes so pleadingly that he felt a fear as if in some way she needed his protection.

"You love maman very much, do you not, my dearie? Better than you love anyone else in all the world?"

"You know I do!" he cried; "better than all the world!"

"It is for my sake, then, that I would go back to our own little place. Shall we go, my child?"

"Come, let us go now, maman!"

Blakemore returned the next evening. He had gone away in a somewhat Quixotic spirit, inspired by the possibly fallacious theory that certain problems work out best when left to themselves. Once in London, with no definite object to occupy his attention, he began to reproach himself with having taken the most cowardly course open to him. He had not thought of his action in that light. It is probable he would have taken the next train back had he not met Mr Mendenhall in a theatre lobby between the acts of the play. They went up to the smoking-room and sat on one of the

lounges, willing to miss an act of a familiar tragedy. Mr Mendenhall had gone to Russia with the Storeys, but had been compelled to return to England just as they were starting for Italy. He had half promised to rejoin them in Rome, and keenly regretted that family affairs were keeping him in London at a time when the town was so beastly dull and the weather so nasty. Mr Mendenhall was clearly in ignorance of the fact that Blakemore had any claim upon the special consideration of Miss Storey, of whom he spoke in terms of such easy familiarity as to convince Blakemore that Mrs Storey at least had been zealous to give definite colour to the friendship.

"You know they have been in Venice for the past three weeks and have just gone to Florence."

No, Blakemore did not know it, and he secretly rebelled against the better information of this well-appearing gentleman, who complacently sipped his wine with such an air of unconscious superiority.

"Yes, I have been invited to join them in Italy," he said equivocally.

"Perhaps we can go together, if you are not going immediately. Have you fixed on a time?"

"No, not definitely." Indeed, he had not very seriously considered the matter. He had intended keeping at work until his picture should be finished. Though he had not been idle in other matters, the six weeks' interruption of a zealous particular ambition made a serious difference with him. The complet-

ing of the painting was problematic, now that days with the necessary sunshine were to be few and uncertain. He had an eagerness to tell Florence that the thing was done and well done, too. He felt that this was in some manner vital to his relations with her. But his mind entertained a disturbing premonition on Marie's account. He fancied, without having clearly reasoned the question, that she might not care to pose for him any more. Women, he thought, have an awkward way of making unreasonable decisions at inopportune times. But would such a decision on her part be altogether unreasonable?

"I think I could get away in a fortnight," said Mendenhall, breaking in upon Blakemore's thoughts. "How would that suit you?"

"I'll tell you in a day or two. I'll have to write to Paris. You see I am in the midst of some work that I ought to finish," he said, half-apologetically, thinking of his quandary.

He began a letter to Marie the next day, but was dissatisfied with the wording of it. He was not in the mood, and he wasted several days without getting into the mood. London is not without its diversions for an idle man. At last he took refuge from the perplexities of composition in the convenience of the telegraph, and wired his question to Marie. Her prompt affirmative reply caused a revulsion of his sentiments, such is the fatuity of man's moral nature. He had felt that he owed reparation to Marie in a

self-devoted sort of way. He had arraigned himself before a stern judgment, that found him culpable without extenuating circumstances; but now, with this submissive telegram in his hand, he began to persuade himself that an offence so readily condoned was not an offence at all, that he had given undue importance to a commonplace incident, and he concluded with a sense of disappointment that there was really nothing to prevent his going to Italy as soon as Mr Mendenhall pleased. He sent a note to that effect to Mendenhall's club, and booked for the morning express.

It was in this restored and philosophical peace of mind that he returned to Paris, and drove to the Rue Denfert-Rochereau, prepared for an indulgent if tearful welcome. He let himself into the house, and found old Fanchette pottering about the rooms in a final supervision before taking herself off to bed. He asked for Marie.

"Ah, la! Madame has been gone these thirty hours. Bundled up to the last shred and ran away as soon as she thought monsieur was coming. *Mon Dieu!* I haven't an idea why. It was not the way we did in the days when I was worth a sweetheart. You wouldn't have caught me running away from Antoine, I can tell you! I always took my mass with a pinch of the devil, and I'm sixty-eight if I have lived a minute—and I hope monsieur does not think that my bones creak yet."

Marie gone made a difference in his reflections.

He rather resented being cheated of the opportunity to go through with the scene he had rehearsed in the cab on the way from the station. He had pictured himself in the flattering attitude of a consoling guardian, but this unforeseen stratagem, for so he regarded it, at once disconcerted and irritated him, throwing him again on the defensive, and at a disadvantage. He sat down to a bite of something to eat with a sense of injury done him, and his reflections were not simplified when he discovered Miss Storey's letter, left face downward on the salon card-table, with a withered rose sentry-like above it. He fumbled with the letter some moments, turning it over and over, restrained from opening it by an annoying sense of unworthiness, and finally put it in his pocket without breaking the seal. He took the rose from the vase, some of its petals falling as he did so, smelled of it, found it unfragrant, made a movement to throw it into the fire, and then impulsively thrust it into the pocket with the letter. The imbecility of this action struck him and he laughed at himself, but he left the rose leaves where they were. It had been his habit when restless or troubled to comfort himself with his 'cello. He reached for the instrument, and, turning off the gas, began playing in the firelight. Soon he drifted unconsciously into the ballet music of Gluck's "Orphée," one of the most exquisite gems of elegy in the range of passionate music, a veritable balsam to melancholy. The strains entered into his soul and possessed it. The

notes took words, and he seemed to hear Orpheus singing:—

"O toi, doux objet de ma flamme,
Toi seule y peux calmer le trouble de mon âme!"

He stopped in the midst of his playing, put on his hat and coat, and went out, following the winding way to the apartment in the Rue St Jacques. The *concierge* had not yet closed the door, and he mounted without question to Marie's *étage*. He pulled the bell-rope and waited. Presently Marie came and spoke through the closed door.

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Walter."

There was a moment's silence, and he took hold of the knob expectantly.

"I cannot see you to-night," she said then quietly.

"But I must speak with you! I have something to say to you!" he urged.

"Come in the morning. Good-night!"

He heard her retiring footsteps, and tapped on the panel, pleading for just a word; but an inner door closed, and he knew that Marie had shut herself into the room where she and Manders slept.

CHAPTER X

MOTHER PUGENS, taught by varied experience and a certain shrewdness of observation to measure and weigh practical values with worldly accuracy, did not by any means approve Marie's flouting of Providence in the guise of fortune. Her tenet of being was to "take the goods the gods provide ye" without argument, a doctrine of belief neither original with nor confined to Mother Pugens and her class. In her opinion, as in that of others who have found that scruples of conscience but poorly offset ease of circumstances, fine gold was much more to be desired than the judgments of the Lord, an opinion she fortified with the excellent proverb that a bird in the hand is more precious than several in the bush. She had contemplated with many approving nods of the head, and some sound, if homely, scraps of philosophy, what she believed to be Marie's progressive steps in wisdom, for of course Mother Pugens had not been credulous enough to think the recent *ménage* in the Rue Denfert-Rochereau a study in Platonism. It was therefore something much akin to chagrin that oppressed her spirit when Marie and Manders came trooping back, bag and baggage, to the miserable

conditions, comparatively speaking, of the Rue St Jacques. Dismay and solicitude expressed themselves in all the convolutions of her generous person, and it is only proper to say that she had a genuine sense of compassion for the folly which could so blind itself to opportunity. She renewed with enlargements the wholesome advice she had given Marie in the first days of her widowhood, only her advice now took the form of remonstrance. It was a thing greatly to be censured that a young woman, with her own and a child's future to think of, should deliberately throw away the advantages she had been lucky enough to secure.

"For my part, I don't know what you can be thinking of! You are much to blame, my dear, for snatching the bread out of your boy's mouth, to say nothing of tearing the clothes off your own back. Fruit does not always hang on the branches that are right within reach, let me tell you. I'll not deny that a pretty young thing like you may find apples for the picking; but my girl Lizette knew very well what she was talking about when she said it is not wise to let go of one thing until you have got your other hand on something better. Young people will have their quarrels, my dear, but don't be a fool. Make up your difference with a good grace, say I, and let the Old Nick get the worst of it. Take a friend's advice, my dear—go back before he knows you have run away."

Marie made no offer to interrupt. She shrunk

into silence under the consciousness that she had abandoned the right to rebuke Mother Pugens or to recoil from comparison with Lizette. When, however, the old woman, believing that she had made an irresistible plea, asked beamingly,—

"Well, what do you say, my dear?"

Marie answered,—

"There has been no quarrel, Mother Pugens. There has been nothing to quarrel about. Edouard was sick, and I stayed where I could care for him. He is well now, and we have come home. That is all there is to it."

"Then the more fool you, my dear," said the other, with a sceptical wobbling of the head, and took herself off, wisely muttering.

Blakemore called half an hour after one of these missionary visits of Mother Pugens. Marie received him in a manner so friendly and frank that he was at once reassured. She suffered him to kiss her cheek, and was passive to the caress of his arm about her shoulder, but she made no responsive gesture.

"You forgive me?" he whispered, lest Manders should hear him in the other room.

"I have nothing to forgive," she answered, her eyes calmly looking into his.

"Then you do love me a little?" he asked, betrayed into the question by his surprise.

"Ah! yes; I love you. I love you." Just a tremble in the voice, as if a sigh or a sob had started and been mastered; just a quiver of the eyelids, as if

they were of a mind to close down over the calm, grey-blue eyes; otherwise a very placid, emotionless answer.

"Then why did you leave me?"

She pointed to the other room, the door between being closed.

"For his sake—and for yours."

"It is for both our sakes that you should have stayed."

She smiled, going from him, and moving a chair forward for him. She sat down on the *sommier*.

"I have told Edouard you were coming. He is waiting in there till I call him. I wanted to talk with you first. I shall not say easily what I want to say, for you know I am not wise. But I have been thinking it over and over, and perhaps you will be able to understand me. But you must not say anything while I am trying to tell you, or I shall get confused, and then it would all go from me and you would not know what I so much want you to know."

He made a movement toward her.

"No need of saying anything, Marie; we understand each other as it is."

She checked him with the uplifting of her hand.

"You must wait until I have told you."

"Yes, I'll let you tell me." He sat back in the chair.

There was a brief pause, as if she were getting her thoughts in order, not quite sure of their beginning or sequence. For all she seemed so self-possessed,

Blakemore felt that she had never been quite so much in need of the comforting touch of a friendly hand. But he would first let her have her way in this tender little comedy of troubled love. There should be self-upbraidings and tears, and reproaches too; and then, strong arms and consolation.

"What do you call *ébéniste?*" she asked presently.

"Cabinet-maker," answered Blakemore.

"My father was a cabinet-maker in Marseilles, and we were very poor." She spoke as if she were continuing a story well begun. "That is why my mother took me for a model to the artists when I was not so old as Edouard. I have always been a model. That is why I know so little. I was always a model for the nude. That is why I never thought it anything until—until Edouard made me think of it. My mother died, and after a time my father. Then an artist brought me to Paris. I was not twelve yet. Everyone took care of me. When I was sixteen I was a favourite model in the schools. M. Manders came with a friend to the Monier Academy one day and saw me. I didn't care for him at first, and never listened to him. But after a time we were married. For a long time,—two years, three years, I don't know,—I did not know what I had done—he was too kind to tell me—but Mother Pugens told me. He was a gentleman, and I had disgraced him, ruined him. I was a model. I don't know why that made a difference, but because he married me his family disowned him, and then—you know what happened."

Her hands were over her face, and tears trickled between her fingers.

"It was no fault of yours," Blakemore cried, going to her and taking her hands in his. "Why do you blame yourself for the idiocy of others? Come, let us think no more of these things. They are past and done with. I am going to be your friend now—yours and Manders'."

The mere shadow of a smile played over her lips, moist with tears.

"Don't you understand what I have been saying to you?" she asked. "I have been telling you of a mistake I have made—a great mistake, a mistake that I am myself just coming to understand. Do you think I am wicked enough to make the same mistake again?"

"What do you mean, Marie? What mistake?"

"You see, all that I intended to say to you has gone away from me. It was all thought out, but it is not clear now. This is clear to me, though; I am not the kind of woman you should marry."

Blakemore started at the word. Marie noted the slight movement, and, comprehending its significance, hesitated a little and then went on in a lower voice, "You could not marry me; I would not let another man ruin his life for me; and, for my boy's sake, I will never be any man's mistress."

She spoke these last words with such quiet dignity with such simple unaffectedness that Blakemore was impressed by the firmness of the purpose be-

hind them. He saw her in quite a new light, and felt humbled by the calm gaze of the eyes, in which there was the softness of a love which was not all maternal. He knew he held the heart of this woman; and he knew, too, that an insuperable barrier was raised between them by the mere poise of a character he had supposed to be weakly submissive. He held her hands in silence, not knowing what to say. He felt that he owed her reparation in some way, but he was at the same time aware that she had closed all ways against him. He was oppressed by the sense of their separation. This was their going apart, their farewell. He knew it instinctively, though his heart beat rebelliously against the thought, and he felt a passionate yearning to take her consolingly in his arms, crying down with a pitiful love all her objections, overcoming by the ardour of his own emotions those self-denying scruples that would do her such grievous wrong. A remembrance of Florence and the day at Vincennes irritated him strangely. He knew that Marie had thought of this more fortunate woman, this woman in every way qualified to be the wife of a gentleman, and he was certain that this thought had magnified in her mind her own unworthiness. He wished to reassure her, to make her understand how little weight conditions had with him, how thoroughly deserving she was of his best esteem, his sincerest devotion. But these very reflections proved to him that it was compassion, pity, repentance which moved in

his sentiments for Marie, that love was something other, for his pulses quickened under these thoughts of Florence, irritating though they were as pricks to conscience.

"Well, Marie?" he said at length, looking down at the hands impassive in his own.

She sighed, as if suddenly aroused from a reverie, and stood up, gently releasing her hands from his clasp as she did so.

"If you wish," she said, "I will pose for you until the picture is finished."

"And then?" he asked, knowing very well what her answer would be.

"Then we will say good-bye."

"No, Marie, not that! We can always be good friends."

"Yes, we can always be good friends," she assented.

"And work together!" he urged.

She shook her head, smiling in a half-sad way, the mist gathering in her eyes. There was no need of words. But he protested still.

"Manders must be thought of, you know. His education must be looked to. You cannot do that as well as I. For Manders' sake, Marie!"

Again she shook her head.

"He will go to school. There are those where it costs but little. I can earn enough."

"In the old way?" he asked.

"In some way," she answered.

"You won't let me help?"

"Yes, you can help; think well of me." She put out her hand, half-humorously, but much in earnest, too.

"Oh! Marie!" He would have kissed her lips, but she turned aside her head, preventing him.

"Shall we go on with the picture?" she asked.

"No," he said, "I shall not finish the picture now." There was a long silence, their clasped hands saying all there was to say.

"Good-bye, Walter!" she said at last.

"Good-bye, Marie!"

"Shall I call Edouard?"

"No."

He took up his hat and stood twirling it in his hands for some moments. Then, suddenly, and thinking only of their parting,—

"I am going to Italy in a few days."

She remembered the letter postmarked Florence.

"Yes; that is right," she said.

CHAPTER XI

EVEN a rigid economy and an exemplary practice of all the personal and domestic virtues will not enable a man with a wife, two daughters, and a son at Harrow, to cut much of a figure in the world if he have no more income than a captain's half-pay. Indeed, there were times in the experience of Captain Warley when the question of a no-longer-to-be-averted new frock for a growing daughter was as formidable a financial problem as the negotiation of a governmental loan. Fortunately for her own peace of mind, Mrs Warley had an aversion to Society, so that one carefully-guarded black satin gown and a mantilla shawl, or cloak, originally the property of her grandmother, served her triumphantly on occasions when she recognised the necessity of making an appearance. The captain, by an equal attentiveness to the folds and creases of a neatly-fitting if no longer fashionable walking suit, could transform himself from morning threadbareness into afternoon gentility with comparatively little effort. Miss Warley, by reason of her vocation, might have enjoyed a respectable, well-dressed independence if she had not been troubled by some primitive ideas of filial responsibility that

urged her to give the moiety of her slender earnings into the household treasury. Nevertheless, her spinster angularities were becomingly enough draped in garments befitting the semi-social character of her professional relations. Miss Polly was at that uncomfortable and dispiriting age for girls of an economic *ménage* when the length of skirts becomes a subject of feeling debate. Her daily battle with the vanities of fortune had to do with the distance between her boot-tops and the hem of her garments, and she thought life injuriously beset by hardships. The young gentleman at Harrow had much the best of it, as the representative at large of the family dignity; and if he was inappreciative of the sacrifices made in his behalf, the household cheered itself to new deprivations by the reflection that a clever lad must be allowed some latitude in the matter of self-development. Altogether a fairly united family, with no more dissension and bickering than the circumstances warranted. To be sure, Mrs Warley had a somewhat acidulated temper, that effervesced without much provocation and sometimes put the captain to the necessity of preparing the family dinner; but the captain admitted to himself that perhaps his cynicisms were rather "rasping" at times, though he meant to be perfectly amiable in uttering them. Indeed, nothing amused or surprised him more than the twists of meaning Mrs Warley could give to a simple and, as he supposed, unoffending speech. He thought she had a special genius for perverting his casual and

innocent remarks into personal affronts when her moods were cloudy, and the long intimacy of their union had not fitted him to read the signs that might have served as warnings to a less optimistic faith than his own.

It was early candle-light, and the four members of the family were seated in the sparely-furnished room that served the double uses of drawing and dining-room. The captain and Miss Polly were absorbed in the intricate game of draughts, which was the favourite pastime of the old soldier, who found a serious campaigning interest in routing the forces of the enemy. Miss Warley was occupied in re-arranging the feathers of her hat, and Mrs Warley was considering the ever-vexatious problem of what should be served for dinner. This tranquillity was disturbed by a ring at the door-bell—extraordinary phenomenon for the hour. There was a general exclamation of surprise, an exchange of inquiring glances, but no one evinced an intention to answer the bell.

"I suppose," said the captain, finally, jumping two of Miss Polly's men as he spoke, "that we might as well see who is there."

Thus urged, Miss Warley went to the door and let in Blakemore.

His reception was so cordial, and in a few minutes he was so much an old, familiar friend, he was reluctant to make it known that business rather than courtesy had prompted his first visit. He followed

the captain's conversational lead so deferentially that the delighted veteran was tempted to mount, in turn, all the hobbies of his intellectual stable, and in showering his opinions upon Blakemore imagined he was enjoying the play of his guest's resourceful fancies. He took more for granted than was justified by Blakemore's admissions, and Mrs Warley was moved to object once in a while,—

"But that is not what Mr Blakemore said, Leonard.'

"It amounts to the same thing," the captain would respond cheerily. "Men of intelligence hold much the same opinions, though they differ sometimes in their modes of expression. Mr Blakemore says he finds a good many things to admire in the French, which does not at all dispute my opinion that they are an abominable people. He thinks them highly artistic, but that is not to deny that they are morally depraved and hopelessly degenerate. He says he likes to live among them, but that is not to say that he does not thank God for having escaped the infamy of being born a Frenchman. I find we are very well agreed, my dear. We see the same thing from slightly different points of view; and you must not forget, my dear, that Mr Blakemore, in addition to being young and an enthusiast, is an American, and the Americans are only now reading the introductory pages of socio-political history. They are not as old as their mother yet," he concluded, with a merry thrust at Blakemore with the end of a goose-quill he had picked up from the table.

Blakemore soon after found a chance to say, "I fear I have overstayed my time without having mentioned one of the chief reasons for my call."

"Overstayed your time!" exclaimed the captain. "Nothing of the kind; you are going to honour us by stopping to dinner."

The captain shot a glance at Mrs Warley, and repented him. But having hoisted the flag of hospitality he determined to keep it floating, despite the threatenings that Blakemore was not in a position to see.

"I say dinner," continued the captain, with redoubled cheeriness, "as a mere figure of speech, for the fact is we have surrendered to one of the barbarisms of the Quarter and take our principal meal at one o'clock. As we all go to bed early, we have got into the way of making our evening repast a mere excuse for good-night conversation. We believe in light eating for sound sleeping. I'm sure you won't mind sharing what scraps we may find in the larder."

Blakemore declared himself flattered to be received so informally into the family circle.

"Don't make any extra preparation," said the captain, with a benevolent flourish, as Mrs Warley started for the kitchen. "Mr Blakemore would rather we wouldn't make company of him. I daresay he hates fuss and feathers. I do, God knows!"

Miss Warley went out, ostensibly to assist her mother, but really to make a flank movement on

the neighbouring *épicerie*. But this stratagem Mrs Warley positively forbade.

"If your father will invite people to dinner when there is not enough in the house to feed a cat, let him take the consequences. I can see no sense in our slaving our lives away economising in this miserable hole, if your father is going to indulge his extravagant caprices in this fashion. I haven't the least idea what there is."

An inventory revealed three slices of ham, a quantity of bread, a jug of milk, a bottle and a half of beer, and enough chicoree for a modest salad.

"Quite enough," said Mrs Warley, emphatically, when Miss Warley once more proposed to move upon the grocer. "It will teach your father a lesson. I only hope he will be sufficiently ashamed of himself."

"I am afraid he won't," said Miss Warley, with a smile.

"No, of course not. The fact that he has put me to a lot of embarrassment would keep him good-humoured through a famine. Nothing gives him so much pleasure as putting me out of temper."

"I didn't mean that, you know, mother," Miss Warley said, in a suave tone, and busying herself with the salad.

"Oh, I know who has your sympathies," Mrs Warley petulantly retorted. "Your father has turned all my children against me. He has taught you all to laugh at me and despise me; but I have no doubt he will reap his reward, in this world or the next.

I should not like to have to suffer his punishment for him! I think you are putting entirely too much oil in that salad. Oil is expensive, and our bills were something frightful last month."

Miss Polly had laid the table, Blakemore assisting her, to the captain's delight; and the veteran, radiating amity and loving-kindness, rashly plunged into the kitchen to help to fetch the things. He returned presently, his gaiety now a mere veneer extravagantly laid on, bearing the beer bottles, the milk jug and the salad. Miss Warley followed with the bread and ham, Mrs Warley bringing up the rear, a glacial smile upon her lips and a grim satisfaction sparkling in her dark brown eyes. The captain's despairing query, "Is this *all* there is?" as he surveyed the kitchen supply had gone far toward restoring Mrs Warley to her occasional sweetness of humour.

"Here we are, Blakemore!" exclaimed the captain, as he re-entered. "Pull up your chair and let us make merry. No form, no airs, you know. It is always Liberty Hall with the Warleys. Look at that! Is that not a salad, eh? What more does a man want with a bottle of beer and a loaf of bread? What have you got there, Matilda, my dear? Ham! Lord bless us, we never eat meat at night! Oh, for Mr Blakemore! Very well, set it in front of his place. But a bad practice, Blakemore, a bad practice, my dear fellow! Nothing so bad for the stomach as meat at night. Bad for the digestion and damnable for dreams. Don't you find it so? But you are young

and tough. I was just as reckless at your age; but we learn, my dear boy, we learn. There is a bottle of beer for you, and here is one for me. The ladies, sensible creatures, never drink anything but milk at this hour, though they don't object to a little wine earlier in the day. We don't care much for French wines as you find them in Paris; not the sort of stuff we have at home. London is the only place in the world for good wine. That's the market! As for the Frenchman's cigars — the less said about them the better. Their good ones are pretty bad, and their bad ones are only fairly good. Really, the French have nothing worth speaking of but pastry—and we don't like that."

Cheerily running on, the captain diffused such a glow of good-fellowship, and imparted to the forced economy of his table such a character of hygienic wisdom, that by degrees the party became as jovial as if Barmecide feasts were the true productive centres of conviviality. Mrs Warley relaxed so much the early austerity of her manner that she undertook to vie with the captain in the discharge of pleasantries, and Blakemore found her a woman of the lively intelligence which allies itself to wit. It was surprising, too, how great a transformation was made in the appearance of Miss Warley, whose plain features assumed a sort of beauty under the spell of sunny gaiety to which she surrendered herself. Kind hearts are wonderful illuminators, and perhaps there are no hearts kinder than those which beat under the prim

bodices and formal waistcoats of English upper middle-class conservatism. Even Miss Polly, still at an age when it becomes one to be seen rather than heard, could not resist the levities of the occasion, but behaved over her milk as if it had been an intoxicant. Altogether, Blakemore thought he had never sat so agreeably at table, and laid down his napkin with the consciousness of having dined to satisfaction. He gave frank expression to his contentment, his remark calling from the captain the wholesome generalisation that hospitality consists not in the things one dispenses but wholly in the spirit of dispensation. As there was no room to which the ladies could retire, the captain, with a deferential wave of the hand in the direction of Mrs Warley, accorded Blakemore the privilege of smoking as they sat, if he was in the habit of smoking after dinner. The captain himself had rather gotten out of the habit, because, as he said, bad tobacco made him ill, and he found it difficult to keep himself supplied with good weeds from abroad. He might have explained that his abstinence was the result of many lectures by Mrs Warley upon the selfish extravagance of buying cigars to waste in nasty smoke when she was doing without a servant in order that the family might wear whole stockings. It was grateful to see, however, the sybaritic gleam in the captain's eyes as he deprecatingly took the undeniably good cigar Blakemore offered him from his pocket-case.

"Merely to be sociable," he said, and, blowing

rapturous clouds above the gently wavering candle flames, he added, with a sigh, "It seems a pity to burn such virtuous tobacco. Do you know, I think that is what was the matter with Cain; he grubbed up a lot of tobacco plants in his ignorance and made a bonfire of them—strong evidence of the theory that the original Garden of Eden was in America."

This irreverent conceit was a favourite pleasantry with the captain, the more cherished for the shock it gave Mrs Warley. He laughed immoderately at her remonstrance, an invariable "Why, Leonard!" and disclaimed responsibility by declaring he had first heard it from General Lord Something-or-other in India, a noble authority for any quotation.

Not until the evening was well advanced, and Miss Polly had retired dutifully to bed at a nod from her mother, did Blakemore find a suitable opening for an explanation of his coming so unceremoniously to the Warleys. He wished to interest them in Manders.

"My daughter thinks him an uncommonly bright boy," the captain said, when the subject was introduced, "and already feels a deep degree of hopeful interest in him. She thinks the trouble is going to be in keeping him back, eh, Matilda, my dear?"

Miss Warley concurred so feelingly that Blakemore felt relieved of embarrassment as to what he should say on Marie's account. He proceeded at once to state his object. He was going away for a time. Madame Manders was not a woman who would

consent to receive benefits from him or anyone to whom she could not make compensation, and, being no longer in his employment, so to speak, she would naturally be disinclined to accept favours at his hands, and he feared she might not be able to afford to give Manders a music teacher. But if it could be made to appear that Miss Warley was enough interested in the boy to give him lessons gratuitously rather than lose so promising a pupil, why, he, Blakemore, would be only too happy to pay the tuition. Madame Manders would be none the worse for the innocent deception from which Manders would derive so much good. "And," continued Blakemore, bestowing upon the captain an argumentative smile as he knocked off his cigar ash, "I should have the satisfaction of knowing that some of my money was being put to a worthy use."

"I understand you perfectly," said the captain, nodding his head sagely, "and I commend your desire thoroughly. My dear young sir, if every man of means would take it upon himself to look out for the future of some deserving poor lad, we could soon close up our prisons and alms-houses, and reorganise society on a decent basis. What we need in this blessed world of ours is the recognition of the fact that no man has a right to be happy who is not intelligently and persistently contributing to the happiness of those who are less fortunate than himself. But we are blackguards—blackguards, the most of us, my dear Blakemore, and we scramble for the front

seats without caring a rap what we trample on. I honour your intention, and I am sure my daughter will cheerfully waive any scruple of conscience that might stand in the way of furthering what you so sensibly term an innocent deception. Am I not right, Matilda, my dear? Don't you fully agree with me, Mrs Warley? Shall we not oblige our young friend? You see it is settled. There is my hand, with the guaranty that my daughter will look after the boy as carefully as if he were her own."

There was some dispute about terms, Blakemore wishing to be generous, the captain insisting upon exact equity and scorning the idea of possible extras,

"There are no extras under an agreement between gentlemen," he declared, with an emphatic shake of the head, and, consulting Miss Warley as to her terms, figured out with mathematical precision that the first quarter, for which Blakemore insisted on paying in advance, would come to just one hundred and thirty-five francs, the amount being at once given into Miss Warley's hands.

"A deuced fine fellow, eh, girls?" said the captain, addressing his wife and daughter, when Blakemore had gone.

"Oh! I suppose there are worse men in the world," Mrs Warley admitted; "but it seems to me he takes rather a curious interest in this Madame Manders, as you call her."

"Suspicious, my dear, always suspicious! It is devilish strange how little faith women have in one

another. One would imagine that you don't believe in any such thing as—"

"Come, Leonard, don't be a fool. It is bed time. You have talked enough for one night."

CHAPTER XII

As the atmosphere and life of Paris stimulate and set in play the sensuous fibres of animal being, so the atmosphere and life of Rome animate the nobler emotions and the finer sentiments of impressionable natures. Sensibility can have no surer re-baptism into moral grace than comes of passing with consciousness from the ever modern and febrile French capital to the tradition-haunted dignity of the first of Italian cities. Vice itself puts on the garment of reserve, and though Hetaira drive along the Corso with her retinue, as her custom is, when the world is gay, the air, heavy with the ghostly memories of two thousand years, softens her laughter into the counterfeit of modesty. It is the extravagance of paradoxy that a city, indelibly stained by excesses in all the crimes and infamies of history, should breathe out the spirit of loftiest inspiration, and quicken in the alien soul all the elements that make for loveliness and virtue. There are squalor and viciousness enough in Rome to eat out the heart of any other city; but the canker may not touch the vitality of Rome while the miraculous dome of St Peter's towers in benediction over the people of the Seven Hills, or the

battered columns of the Forum are respected witnesses to the solemnity of a glorious past.

This is seldom a first impression. Disappointment is heavy upon the spirit in the initial days. Modernity gives to expectant enthusiasm a humiliating blow that makes appreciation slow, and Miss Storey, just come from Florence, a city instantly responsive to one's preconceived ideal, felt the change grievously and wished at once to re-arrange their winter plan. But by the time Blakemore and Mr Mendenhall arrived, the place had, as she expressed it, begun to lay hold on her, and the sympathies of these two young men, affectionately acquainted with Rome, speedily brought her to a complete surrender, so that by the end of an exceptionally benignant January, she was, as Mrs Storey declared, "a Roman fanatic."

Blakemore had joined the Storeys with a wavering sense of proprietory right over Florence in his mind, and was disposed to attach a special importance to some trifling incidents of their Paris leave-taking. He contrived visits to galleries and churches that should exclude the other and dispensable members of the quartette, sentimental projects in which Florence showed an acquiescent interest, but of which Mr Mendenhall was always mysteriously aware in time to give them his personal attention. Mrs Storey's intuitions seemed to be almost equally fine, and Blakemore began to take argumentative note of the fact that whenever the chances of sight-seeing separated the party, it was his invariable fortune to

be left in the charge of this peremptorily vivacious lady. Of course he took occasion to tax Florence with duplicity, adding to his plaint a certain amount of mild reprobation. Looking at him with an affectation of surprise, in which lay a good deal of mischievous malice, she exclaimed, "And do you think, my dear Walter, that I dare trust myself alone with you after the way you behaved the last time we were together without guardians? Besides, I like being with Mr Mendenhall. He has ideas; and he isn't always trying to stop me in front of pictures with cupids in them. He actually knows the history of the things and places we see, and can tell me about them, and do it without making me feel my ignorance. On the other hand, mamma is getting to like you very well, and thinks you quite a respectable *cicerone*. I should suppose you would see the advantages of the arrangement without an elaborate explanation. But since you are unreasonable enough to want to limit my pleasures, do you mind telling me upon what grounds you base your claim to my obedience?"

"I thought an engagement conferred some privileges on a fellow," said Blakemore, smiling, but not entirely confident.

"That is something I know nothing about," she replied complacently. "I suppose an engagement allows of a certain amount of freedom, but I have never felt the need of it. I have always been at perfect liberty to do as I pleased, and I never could see that an engagement would enlarge my scope of

action. When I find myself hampered, I'll think about it. In the meantime, please bear in mind that your only right in me is the right to have a serious talk with me some eighteen months from now if I am then inclined to listen to you."

"But your letters to me—" urged Blakemore.

"Mere compositions, my dear Walter. It is the duty of every self-respecting woman to advance herself in the art of letter-writing. She never knows when it may become useful. That is all that ever made Madame de Sévigne or Jane Carlyle anything more than domestic appendages. You are not bigot enough to deny one some latitude in that field of invention, I hope? I must have someone on whom to practise! Why are men so ridiculously given to making logical deductions from simple casualties?"

Indeed, Blakemore smoked many a good-night cigar that lost flavour in the bitterness of his reflections upon the fretful deficiencies and irritating overpluses of this particular season in Rome, the least satisfying of the several he had passed in the hitherto favoured city. Mrs Storey, who professed an abhorrence of hotels, and a detestation of pensions, had taken a small but comfortable house just beyond the Porto del Popolo in the embrace of the Pincian hill, where she entertained with such incessant energy that Florence seemed to revolve in the inner eddies of an ever-widening social swirl which kept Blakemore in its outward expansion. Necessarily there was an increasing number of reciprocal parties and

dinners of a limited character, to which neither Blakemore nor Mr Mendenhall was invited, and they found opportunities to indulge in those employments precious to the hearts of men which are exclusive of the frivolously feminine. It was on one of these occasions that, as they idled over their coffee and cognac in the smoke-room of their hotel, Mr Mendenhall suddenly asked,—

"Do you ever play?"

"Oh! yes, once in a way; though I am not much good at it—except for the other fellows," Blakemore answered, laughingly. "Why? Are you much in that way?"

"Well, I have not done much at it since I tried a 'system' at Monte Carlo last season. But I feel in the mood for a turn at it to-night. What do you say?"

"I don't mind a lira or two," Blakemore assented. "I haven't looked at a card for a year. But I should prefer a quiet little game of poker to baccarat. One loses so much more intelligently when he holds the cards himself."

"You Americans have such a passion for 'bluff.' Do you know Orteviti's?"

"No."

"I'll introduce you. A quiet sort of place. A kind of club, you know, where you only meet the right sort. You can lose your money without suspicion. Your gentleman Italian is the most refined gamester in the world, and takes your purse in

a way that does you honour. Come along. We'll go to the ballet for half an hour or so and get to Orteviti's in the thick of it. Orteviti, you know, belongs to a splendid old family, and had a doge or two, and half a dozen senators for his ancestors. Poor as the devil now, but has to keep up appearances. Lives at Venice in the summer, and puts gilt on the family traditions with his winter earnings. Most pathetic thing, the old Italian nobility. Rags and pride makes a deucedly uncomfortable combination; but the beggars have really got something to be proud of. I don't know but they've got the best of it after all. There is something great about a nation that will starve to death rather than part with its art treasures. Some of our commercial idiots will tell you that the Italians hang on to their pictures and things merely as a bait to money-spending tourists. Rot! without a yard of canvas or a foot of statuary, Italy would have attraction enough to draw the world into her sunshine. Why, just to lie in a gondola and see the sun go down, or the moon come up behind the domes of Venice; or to chuck coppers at the naked little brats swimming in the Bay of Naples; or to watch the washerwomen on the banks of the Arno; or to fish in the mud of old Tiber, here, is worth all the damned nonsense of our pompous modernism, with its trade arrogance and its gold-clinking vulgarities. I always feel like an ass swaggering through the church parade in Hyde Park, or gasping in the crush of some ostentatious reception,

or bolting the dishes of a deadly ceremonious dinner; but when I get under the skies of Italy, where you can reach up and touch the blue, and see spread around you every tone and shade and form and condition that enters into the perfection of beauty, I feel like a son of God, and I'm devilish glad to be alive. What are you laughing at? Come along; I am dangerously in the way of saying something. It is lucky they have ballets and things in Italy, or we would all be writing Childe Harolds, Casa Guidi windows and stuff of that sort. There is enough of the earth and the flesh here to keep the average man normal. But I should think you painters would go stark mad."

The ballet was "Excelsior," a great rage at the time, and the two friends were familiar enough with it to time its best effects and escape the *ennui* of its less interesting features. The ballet, as the worldling knows, is a form of mental dissipation most enjoyable when taken in small allowances and standing. Nothing is as destructive of the æsthetic values of the *divertissement* as a fatigued eye or an indolent posture of body. Blakemore and Mendenhall drifted about, giving the stage a critical attention from different points of view, gossiping with acquaintances, exchanging glances with would-be indulgent signorinas, until the Triumph of Light reminded them of Orteviti and the real purpose of their evening.

The places at table were taken, with one exception, and Mendenhall sat in this, Blakemore playing over

his shoulder, in an incidental way, that permitted him to look about. The spacious room was charmingly furnished, and presented so little the appearance of a gambling establishment, that one might have supposed that a gracefully luxurious drawing-room had been temporarily surrendered to the pleasure of a purely social card party. At one of the further tables were several young women in the light splendour of evening dress, who played with an intent silence which betrayed the entirely practical purpose of the gathering. In the course of an hour the new arrivals were numerous enough to make the standing players as many as those who were seated, and Mendenhall was having such a run of luck that several players were following his lead. One of these was a nervously impulsive man, prematurely grey, and wearing a decoration, who stood immediately at the left of Blakemore, and placed his bets or recovered his winnings with exclamations of such personal *aplomb* that one might have thought his volition alone determined the run of the cards. After a time Mendenhall lost several plays in succession, and on the last of these the nervous gentleman so far forgot himself as to tap Mendenhall on the shoulder as he said irritably,—

"Sir, you are playing without discretion."

Mendenhall looked up, saying with good humour,—

"Then it is very foolish of you to follow me."

"I do not follow you, sir!"

"Then be good enough not to comment on my play."

"You are insolent, sir."

"And you impertinent."

"Make your play, gentlemen," said the croupier, in his perfunctory way.

Mendenhall prepared to place his billets.

"My card," said the nervous gentleman, thrusting the article in front of Mendenhall.

"Thank you; I have no use for it at present," said Mendenhall, imperturbably.

"Will you oblige me with yours?" demanded the other.

"With pleasure," Mendenhall answered, taking a card from his case and handing it up over his shoulder without looking at the angry gentleman, who took it very ceremoniously, but saying satirically,

"It lacks an address, sir."

Mendenhall named his hotel, whereupon the gentleman, declaring that he had the honour to bid his adversary good-night, withdrew with much dignity to another position at the table, where he carefully inscribed the address on the card.

No one besides Blakemore gave any attention to the incident or seemed to lift eyes from the cloth. The gaming-table is the one arc of the sociological circle at which the gathered particles preserve an incurious individuality. To mind one's own business is the exclusive occupation of this the only practicable democracy. But Blakemore was seriously disturbed, perhaps owing to an insufficient interest in the game, and in deference to his solicitude, Mendenhall soon

after arose, not much the gainer by the evening's industry. As they were putting on their overcoats, Blakemore said, lapsing into a southernism,—

"Well, I reckon you are in for it."

"Oh! I don't know," Mendenhall answered, smiling; "that was Count Vasselli. He has a mania for collecting cards, I believe. If he doesn't forget the episode by morning he will probably send me an apology, accompanied by an invitation to eat spaghette with him. In any event, you needn't have any concern on my account. I fence rather well."

When they got into the street there were no cabs in sight, but being in the vein for a smart walk to the hotel, they pushed along with little better light than the paling fires of the morning stars. They were crossing into one of the narrow, winding, dark streets running at right angles with the Corso, when, experience common enough to belated pedestrians through the meaner quarters of Rome, they were suddenly set upon by a half-dozen zealous but unreasoning ruffians, unlearned in the hitting power of two physically-trained Anglo-Saxons with a prejudice against highway robbery. Several minutes of persistent demonstration were necessary to convince the thoughtless aggressors of their want of judgment, but even then it was the chance appearance of two of the constabulary rather than the force of blows that determined their flight.

"Rather lively, eh?" said Mendenhall, laughing, as their assailants made away.

"Yes. Did you get hurt?"

"No, I think not, though one of them gave me a sharp thump in the side that I felt for a moment."

The officers were less disposed to pursue the fugitives than to question suspiciously the victims of the assault. In the midst of answering their excited inquiries, Mendenhall grasped Blakemore's shoulder, exclaiming,—

"By George, old fellow! I've got a queerish sensation! You would better take hold of me."

And not only Blakemore had need to take hold of him, for, with some jocular protests against being made the butt of a peculiarly feminine artifice he presently slipped into unconsciousness; and the officers became aware that they had neglected a rare chance to distinguish themselves in a chase after assassins.

"Well, doctor?" Blakemore asked anxiously at the hotel half an hour later, as the surgeon turned from dressing Mendenhall's wound.

"A serious case," replied the doctor, shaking his head. "But I think it will be all right. Any relatives—any women here?"

"No." But he thought of Mrs Storey and Florence. The idea of either of them in a sickroom struck him as being painfully grotesque.

But ministering angels are to be had for hire in these forward days of systematised pursuits, and there was no danger that Mendenhall would lack for suitable care.

Mendenhall himself said to the surgeon,—

"Is there any hope of pulling me through?"

"Every hope," was the answer.

"Then send no word to my family as long as you have a hope."

Happily, hope is a virtue easy to be entreated, and there came no need for the message home. Mendenhall had a constitutional right to recovery, which he exercised with heroism, and mended apace. After the crisis was past there came flowers and messages from the Storeys, and then came the Storeys themselves.

"I don't care what people say," Miss Florence urged against her mother's conventional objections. "People's opinions are much too silly for one to bother oneself about. Mr Mendenhall is a friend and among strangers. If by reading to him or talking with him an hour or two a day I can help along his getting well, it is my duty to do it; and I'll make it my pleasure, too."

"Very well," Mrs Storey assented at last, shrugging her shoulders, but consoling herself with the possibility that "something may come of it." The fact that an able-bodied and youngish heir to great expectations had been so suddenly and so vulgarly brought near to the end of things instructed her anew that time is measured by incidents rather than by duration, and that it is the part of wisdom to make hay when the sun shines. This vein of philosophical reflection led her to the conclusion that the accident to Mendenhall was a providential

interposition that promised to correct that obliquity of mind in Florence which seemed to prefer a commonplace dabbler in oils to a prospective peer. She found it convenient to superintend the daily visits that were drawing nigh unto intimacy, and imagined that she detected symptoms altogether flattering to her hopes. If it were not for the unbalancing presence of Blakemore, she thought there could be no reasonable doubt as to the outcome of relations so romantically fostered. Perhaps, within the circumstances, it was in a measure pardonable if her maternal sentiments gave an exultant bound when, the morning after Mendenhall's first venture out for a carriage ride, Blakemore came agitatedly to tell her and Florence that he was off to catch the first American steamer, a cable message having notified him of his father's probably fatal illness. Judge Blakemore, being an estimable gentleman and one of the justices of the Supreme Court of her country, had always enjoyed Mrs Storey's respect and admiration, and perhaps had been allowed some share in her sincere regard; but she felt that he had never done anything so graceful as timing his demise to suit her purposes, so there was a good deal of genuineness in the sympathetic tears with which she bade the son good-bye. Walter was one of the surviving examples of that perhaps fortunately almost extinct species of young gentlemen who submissively reverenced and loved their begetters, and grief at parting with Florence was not the chief

burden of his heart. The young lady easily discerned her disadvantage at the moment, but, strangely enough, she put it under most favourable interpretation. He parted from her in Mrs Storey's presence, and the only sign between them was that Florence held out to him the hand on which sparkled the ring he had given her.

CHAPTER XIII

As he was leaving the hotel, after having tipped in the proper mathematical ratio the army of servants summoned to witness his departure, Blakemore was handed a letter from Miss Warley. No one, perhaps, has attempted to ascertain why spinsters who approach middle age are so much more conscientious than the rest of the world, though every one is pleasantly or painfully, according to conditions, aware of the fact. Miss Warley was even punctilious, and she conceived it to be her duty, as a beneficiary of Blakemore's bounty, to make and forward a monthly memorandum of whatever concerned the musical progress or personal welfare of Manders. These reports were mere memoranda, for Miss Warley was restrained by a nice sense of feminine propriety from entering into anything in the nature of a friendly correspondence with a young man who might be equal to the misinterpretation of purely disinterested motives. Blakemore opened the letter as he drove to the station, and read the usual approbation of Manders, there being nothing in the report itself to justify the

writing. A postscript, however, interested him in one of its sentences.

"I have done as you requested about the piano. I got a very suitable one for four hundred francs. I told Madame Manders it was one I got at a bargain, and begged her to take care of it for me. She, by the way, coughs in a way I don't like. She caught a cold two or three months ago, that hangs on most stubbornly. She laughs when I speak about it, and says it doesn't trouble her at all. Perhaps it is nothing."

The pulling up of the cab at the station roused Blakemore from a reverie, and he smiled to remember the absurdity of it. He had been building all sorts of inconsequential fancies around that cough of Marie's, as if a cough were something new under the sun. And Marie might pose for the goddess Hygeia herself.

Someone called to him. Mendenhall was sitting in a cab at the opposite end of the platform.

"You didn't expect to see me here? I drove out as far as the tomb of Cecilia Metella after bidding you good-bye, when I recollected that I hadn't paid you off as nurse. I want you to wear this."

He took a pin from his cravat as he spoke and gave it to Blakemore. It was a moonstone in an old-fashioned, curious setting with small diamonds.

"My grandfather picked it up somewhere in India. I believe it belonged to a rajah who

afterwards died some sort of death. There is no end of bad luck goes with a moonstone. Everybody who has anything to do with one is bound to die soon or late. I hope you are thoroughly superstitious?"

"I am," said Blakemore, as he put the pin in his own cravat, "so I'll have to buy the point of this, you know. There is your money," giving Mendenhall a two lire piece.

Mendenhall thought him rather serious.

"By George! I believe you *are* superstitious!" he said, laughing.

Blakemore smiled. "I'll take my chances," he said.

But he imagined that he had excellent reason to be disturbed in mind by this simple and apparently very friendly incident. This pin and a ring were the only ornaments worn by Mendenhall, and the one was as much identified with him as the other. Blakemore now recalled a remark made by Florence in commenting upon Mendenhall's evident fondness for the pin.

"I could never marry a man who owned a moonstone."

He thought it singular that this disfavoured object should be made a gift to him at this particular time, and he argued from it to conclusions not in the least agreeable. He could not see in it the chance offering of an amiable spirit; he recognised only a purpose on Mendenhall's part to get

rid of something to which Florence affected an aversion. Clearly enough Florence had expressed her prejudices to Mendenhall himself. The question in Blakemore's mind was of Mendenhall's motive in giving the pin to him. Was it the act of a conscious rival who supposed his purpose could not be suspected, or was Mendenhall deceived by a belief that he occupied a preferred place in Florence's esteem? Blakemore was not long in forming the opinion that Mendenhall was a man incapable of duplicity in his professed friendships with men; and this conviction forced him to the inference that Florence was not above playing fast-and-loose with more than one heart at a time. Yet Florence was audacious in her candour. And had she given him any right to feel an exclusive claim to her devotion? Was not the understanding between them one that left them both free to form such attachments as should best please them in the course of two years? He ended by acquitting both Mendenhall and Florence, without greatly consoling himself.

"I've half a mind to make a trip to your country myself," said Mendenhall, as they parted. "Don't be surprised if I walk in on you some fine morning." He had left the cab, and, leaning on a stick, was walking beside Blakemore, not much the worse for his illness."

"You will always find the latch-string outside the door," Blakemore responded warmly. "And I think you owe it to yourself to come. A man cannot

appreciate civilisation until he has visited the United States."

"One can take that remark either way," Mendenhall said, laughingly.

"Take it the right way," laughed Blakemore.

They talked purposelessly until the voyagers were requested to take their places.

"Any final message for the ladies?" Mendenhall asked, as the guard closed the carriage door. Blakemore considered a moment.

"Yes, tell Miss Storey that you have given me your moonstone," he said, with a droll expression not easy to interpret.

"A singular message!" Mendenhall thought, watching the train pull away. "I wonder if he knows? Rather awkward if he does. What the deuce prompted me to give it him? Perhaps he and Florence— By George, I'll find out!"

He returned to his cab, giving the driver the address of the Storeys.

Mrs Storey and Florence were engaged in one of those largely one-sided talks which Mrs Storey styled "a little friendly conversation," consisting of maternal views oratorically declaimed and filial interruptions not always reverential. Naturally enough, Mrs Storey was relieving her mind of the burden of thoughts which sprang spontaneously out of her satisfaction in being delivered of Blakemore's depressing presence. She was a firm believer in the curative power of absence over the disorders of the feminine heart, but

did not attach enough importance to the contributory virtues of a still tongue. In her moral pharmacopœia insistence was everything, and to "hammer away" at a given idea was to ensure its efficacy. Florence evidently was predisposed to think too well of Blakemore. The remedy, then, lay in the urgency of Blakemore's special and general demerits. Mrs Storey had been inspired to describe him as "a flaccid young man," and the phrase seemed to her so apposite that she coddled it in all the variations of the thesaurus. Florence was trifling with the keys of the piano, rather more interested in the graceful use of her fingers than conscious of the piece she was slighting, and not strictly attentive to her mother. Her peaceful acceptance of the eloquence in depreciation of the supposed object of her inclination was gratifying to Mrs Storey as the evidence of a successful treatment, and the amiable lady was encouraged to emphasise her criticisms.

"The long and short of it is," she said, "that he lacks intellectual stamina."

"That is not it," interrupted Florence; "he has too much sensibility. He has not yet got rid of all of his conscientious scruples."

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mrs Storey. "He is an emotional weather-vane, that whirls from one sentimental point of the compass to another with every change of circumstance. He has neither stability of purpose nor fixity of idea, and no more intelligent ambition than a caterpillar. I don't believe he will

ever amount to a row of pins. He is one of the men you can lead about by the nose as they do donkeys."

"An excellent quality in a husband, don't you think, mamma? You have had a pleasant experience, I should say."

"You are unkind, Florence, to twit me with your father's infirmities! I didn't make the man! But though I have learned to make the best of a difficult position, I have no wish to see you subjected to the like conditions. I am giving you the benefit of my experience in advising you how to avoid my mistakes. Nothing could grieve me so much as seeing you married to one of those domestic animals who think their petty orbit makes the circumference of the universe."

"Then you don't think Mr Mendenhall is a 'domestic animal'?"

"Not of the ruminating variety. But I don't see why you need be frivolous. I am not thinking of men as mere men. I suppose in that respect one is as good or as bad as another. But I am thinking of them in their relation to Society as units or ciphers, and I positively revolt against the idea of being made the mother-in-law of a cipher. Walter Blakemore is not only a cipher; he has the minus sign in front of him as well. Mr Mendenhall fills the eye quite as commandingly, and has a place in the world already prepared for him. He is somebody. There is no comparison between them. One is scarcely a possibility, the other is a fact; one is a gentleman by sufferance, the other by an ancestral patent of

nobility; one may get so far as to be a tolerable painter of miniatures, the other will in all probability be a peer and able to hire painters as he needs them; one can keep you struggling in the social crush, the other would lift you above the mob; but I don't insist on Mr Mendenhall, if you are able to do better. I don't care to pick out the man; I only stipulate for position."

"And happiness, mamma?"

"Bah! the happy woman is the envied woman. I wish you would study life instead of reading novels. The sentimental twaddlers who write books are responsible for nine-tenths of the married misery. They stuff foolish heads full of insipid romance, and make girls believe that marriage is a sort of Virginia reel, in which one is always grinning at her partner. Marriage should be an exact science based on careful calculation, and the happy marriages are practical ones, in which sentiment is an after consideration or no consideration at all."

Florence rose from the piano with a laugh as the bell rang.

"You are delicious, mamma! What a pity you are not at the head of a girls' boarding-school! What sport you could have with the affinities. And I suppose you would end by becoming an advocate of polyandry. What a triumph for woman when she can have an assortment of variously distinguished husbands, ranging from a dissipated duke to a rising theologian."

"Sometimes, Florence, your ideas are positively indecent," said Mrs Storey, severely.

Mendenhall was shown in, to the surprise of both ladies, who thought it imprudent of him to be driving out alone so soon after being set free of the doctor's care.

"I am quite myself again," he insisted. "In fact I was kept in a week longer than was necessary. These Italian doctors don't know much about English constitutions. I only carry a stick to oblige the old medico, who would feel chagrined if I made the case less serious than he thought it was."

"It is so strange they don't catch the scoundrels who did it," Mrs Storey ventured.

"I am not so sure they haven't caught them," said Mendenhall, smiling. "I was pretty certain of one of the chaps they brought in for me to look at the other day; but I've known so many cases of mistaken identity that I gave the poor devil the benefit of the doubt, and they let him go."

"To do better next time, with a longer knife," Florence suggested.

"You are uncommonly tender-hearted, Mr Mendenhall," Mrs Storey said, bestowing a look of benevolent approval upon him.

"I'm afraid not," Mendenhall answered, giving an emphatic though slight side jerk of the head to indicate his seriousness. "I am of rather a vindictive turn of mind. I find a great deal of keen pleasure in getting the better of my enemies, and I have no

objection whatever to grinding my heel into the head of a reptile that may get in my path. But I do not believe that every man with criminal aptitudes is really a criminal, or that every hang-dog-looking ruffian is necessarily an assassin. Then, to be candid with you, I hate the tedious processes and lingering stupidities of French and Italian courts of law, and I would rather my assailant should go scot-free than that I should have to go through the worry of the prosecution. As it is, the police seem to be acting on the theory that I am the guilty party, and Mr Blakemore, in going away, is really a fugitive from justice."

They laughed with him, and presently Mrs Storey, chattering something about wine and biscuit for an invalid, went out to give some orders, forgetting, perhaps, that a bell-rope dangled within reach of the chair in which she had been sitting.

"I came to have a talk with you alone," Mendenhall said promptly as the door closed after Mrs Storey.

"That was very nice of you," Florence said, smiling, and taking a chair nearer to him. "Have you anything especially interesting to say?"

"That depends upon how you take it. I am going to be very blunt about it." His manner was more earnest than she thought it needed to be.

"You usually are. What you say has the merit of being easily understood."

He came to the point at once.

"I want to know if there is anything between you and Mr Blakemore?" He leaned forward a little, his forearm on his knee.

"Decidedly you are blunt about it! and just a bit impudent, too, aren't you? Suppose I decline to admit your right to ask me such a question?"

"That would be a sufficient answer," he said, sitting erect again.

Florence laughed. He was allowing her a glimpse of an unsuspected amusing side of his character. Jealousy in a strong, well-balanced man of the world was an entertaining abnormity. She had not foreseen anything so interesting in the make-up of one whom she had always found self-contained and complacent. She deployed those feminine artifices of attitude and look which are supposed to put the reasoning masculine mind at a disadvantage. The attack seductive is a manœuvre to be counteracted only when *amour-propre* is conscious of a social obligation to be respected. Merely personal defences amount to nothing, for the man most grievously abused or most indignantly fired by feminine disloyalty or caprice is as wax to flame under the propitiatory blandishments of a beloved strategist.

Florence, quite ignorant of the provocation, felt a pleasure in the lowering look with which Mendenhall regarded her, and prepared for an agreeable skirmish that should make her undisputed mistress of the situation. She had not before given much thought to the conquest of Mendenhall.

"Why do you ask?" she asked, looking sidewise at him and toying with a flower in her belt.

"Because I am not the sort of man to use a friend as a shuttlecock!"

Not at all the answer expected. It lacked the necessary element of personal grievance, and Florence was taken aback. She raised her head and her smile gave way to a serious, possibly a resentful expression. She realised at once that the case was not one of simple jealous and corrective pastime.

"I don't think I understand you," she said. "Be good enough to explain your meaning."

"Will you tell me if Mr Blakemore is anything more to you than a family friend?"

"Will you tell me how that question concerns you?"

"I gave Blakemore my moonstone at the station!"

"Well?"

She raised her eyebrows, looking at him, surprised and expectant. She seemed in no way overwhelmed. There were no indications of detected guiltiness. If there was anything more than bewilderment in her eyes, it was a glint of sarcasm that seemed to convict him of some folly. Nothing more exasperates a man than a suspicion that he has made a fool of himself in a woman's eyes at the moment when he thought to be most commanding. Mendenhall felt that he had made a mistake.

"Perhaps I haven't begun in the right way," he said, unwilling to yield, yet speaking in an apologetic tone. "I may have given importance to a trifle, but

I came here believing that you had—well, made it possible for me to—to insult Mr Blakemore."

Florence rose, looked at him an instant and turned toward the door. Mendenhall sprang up, stepped ahead of her, and held his hand out deprecatingly.

"Don't go. Not until I have made myself clear. You needn't forgive me, but at least understand me. I can make it plain in a word—I love you."

He made no offer to touch her. There was quite enough passionate earnestness in his voice, quite enough eagerness in his face, but Blakemore and he had become friends, and the incident at the station was not yet explained.

"That justifies everything, of course." She smiled as she spoke, and turned back to the chair on which she had been sitting. "Well, what is the offence for which you wish to chastise me? I believe you said something about a shuttlecock. Am I one of the battledores, or have I been one of the players? And what is the great solemnity attached to the giving away of a moonstone? And please sit down; I don't like looking up so high."

He did as she directed, saying, as he seated himself, "I remember your saying to me that you would never marry a man with a moonstone."

"Oh! I say no end of silly things, Mr Mendenhall. I hope you are not ungenerous enough to keep a record of them."

"And you must have said the same thing to Mr Blakemore."

"Possibly. I can't always be original in my remarks. You know there are no new ideas, and we must content ourselves with rearrangements of old ones. Probably I did not say it to Mr Blakemore in precisely the same way as I said it to you."

"I took that for granted, for you were jesting with me, but Blakemore's expression, when I gave him the pin, leads me to believe that you have been in earnest with him. Have you?"

"And if I have, what then?"

"I shall quit Rome to-morrow and send a telegram to Blakemore's boat telling him of the fact."

"How *moyen age!* And if I have been no more in earnest with him than with you?"

"I should not think it necessary to go."

"You may as well stay, if you have no other reason for going."

Her smile was perplexing, but he put an interpretation on it, and made an impulsive movement to take her hand.

"Do you mean—" he began, but she stood up laughingly, and keeping her hand from him.

"Don't let your habit of taking things for granted mislead you again, Mr Mendenhall. I have not bid you stop in Rome."

"But I have told you that I love you. If you are free, if Blakemore has no claim upon you—" He was standing in front of her, and held out his arms as if to clasp them about her.

"Really, Mr Mendenhall," she said, stepping back

from him, "your solicitude for Mr Blakemore seems to allow me but a poor place in your opinion. One can hardly be flattered by a love that is subordinate to a friendship for another man."

"You wouldn't care for a love that took no account of honour," he said urgently, coming nearer to her.

"I should doubt the genuineness of a love that took account of consequences," she replied, something of a challenge in her eyes. "I think you are better fitted to play the *rôle* of a friend than that of the lover."

"Florence!" He caught her impetuously by the arms.

"I hear my mother," she said, releasing herself, and moving away from him.

The door opened and Mrs Storey entered. Her quick, calculating eyes took in the situation at a glance. Florence was self-possessed and ready; Mendenhall was disconcerted and awkward.

"I have come a little too soon," Mrs Storey complained to herself.

CHAPTER XIV

AN opportunity to renew the conversation so untimely interrupted did not soon present itself; more accurately speaking, Florence carefully avoided or nullified the occasions with which fortune and Mrs Storey were disposed to favour Mendenhall. If the two were left alone together, as inevitably happened now and again, Florence launched into such impertinent talk as would have made the introduction of a sentimental subject ridiculous from Mendenhall's point of view. In his opinion, love-making with a matrimonial objective was a momentous affair. Light-witted campaigning he reserved for quite another phase of the passion, and he would have imagined himself wanting in delicacy were he to arrest mental frivolity with a heart emotion. He lent himself wholly to Florence's moods, but at the same time he assured himself that he was making progress with her, and that circumstances would fashion a suitable hour for the reward of his patience. Satisfied that he was obliged to no chivalrous restraint in Blakemore's behalf, he was in no haste to have his own amatory status defined, finding a peculiar pleasure in the torments of un-

certainty. Florence, as a problem in possibilities, had, for him, a stimulating fascination that he feared might disappear with the establishment of a positive understanding between them; so he continued on "dawdling," as Mrs Storey said to herself with some irritation.

Blakemore had been gone six weeks, and spring had come in with a rush that had splashed the young verdure of Rome with great patches of white and yellow and purple blossom, and filled the soft air with the rich perfume of the great stone pines. The three had come for a morning stroll through the extensive and picturesquely beautiful grounds of the Villa Borghese, animated by hundreds of people joyous in the sunshine or in the already welcome shadows of the trees. There is a secluded fountain with great circular stone basin, whose moss-grown rim rises waist-high above the ground, its water, dark under the shading trees, seeming to have an unfathomable depth. Centuries were necessary, one would imagine, to give the fountain its appearance of solemn antiquity, but Mendenhall, leaning over the basin and swishing his stick in the water, said,—

"How like the Italians! Having destroyed pretty much everything that was really old in Rome, they construct these shams to trick the imagination."

"But they are not shams," insisted Florence. "What difference does it make how old or how new they are, if they fill the purpose of beauty and fit in with the romance of the scene? I've no patience

with you stupid people who get all your enthusiasms out of dates, and affect such a precious scorn of the modern. Your enthusiasms are not enthusiasms at all, but gushing echoes of somebody else's worked-up extravagances."

"Then I suppose the Coliseum—" Mendenhall began smilingly.

"That isn't the same sort of thing at all," Florence interrupted. "It is the imposing, awful majesty of the thing itself, plus our knowledge of the fearful and splendid uses to which it was put, and not its age, that inspire and thrill us. If it were a question of age, you would better fall down and worship the hill behind it, which I dare say is some thousands of years older. Do you love the Venus of Milo because it is old and battered, or because it is incomparably beautiful in spite of being old and battered?"

"Well, for a little of both, I think. I am not sure, but I think age is the greatest painter of the beautiful."

"Now that is a platitude. How deep do you think this water is?"

"I don't know; I'll see."

He put down his stick until his hand was wrist-deep in the water.

"There is more of it than I thought," he laughed; "I'll have to undo my cuff." He began fumbling at the links. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind doing it for me?"

He held out his dripping hand to her. Mrs Storey had wandered some distance beyond them and sat

watching a group of picturesquely ragged children capering for coppers.

"You needn't take that trouble about it; let me try; my sleeve is loose." She shoved her sleeve above her elbow and reached for the stick. The arm was white and round and good to look upon.

"The water is a little chilly," he said, still retaining his hold upon the stick.

"So much the better; getting angry with you has made me warm."

"I didn't know you were angry."

"That is because you are not penetrating. It always makes me angry when I have to defend my opinions."

She thrust the stick into the basin and began groping for the bottom.

"Mercy! there is no bottom to it! Pull my sleeve up higher — clear to the shoulder. That will do. Ooh! how delightful it is! I'd like to plunge in all over. What a good thing it must have been to be a nymph. This fountain was undoubtedly made for nymphs. That is why there is no bottom to it; if there is, I can't reach it. Is your arm much longer than mine?"

"Perhaps I would better find you a longer stick."

"Do. Will it matter if I lose hold of your stick? I came near doing so."

"It will come to the top if you do."

He went off to find a suitable rod, and she began amusing herself thrusting the stick down and letting

it shoot up of its own buoyancy, becoming childishly absorbed in a pastime to which excitement was added by the wilful attempts of the stick to come up beyond her reach.

Mendenhall came back with a handful of long grasses. "Here we are," he said, putting them down on the rim of the basin.

"What in the world is that for?"

"I'll tie these blades of grass together, make a line, and with a pebble at the end we'll have a first-class plummet."

"Really, I believe you are clever."

"Well, you'd better stop playing in that water. Take my handkerchief and dry your arm."

"I suppose mamma would have a fit if she saw me."

She took the handkerchief he held to her and began drying her arm as he set about making his sounding-line. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation of alarm. Mendenhall looked up.

"What's the matter?"

"I have lost one of my rings—the one Walter gave me."

"The one 'Walter' gave you!" he repeated, stopping still and looking hard at her.

She had spoken unconsciously, but his manner restored her balance.

"I should have said lent me; it is his, not mine," she replied easily, but there was more than the usual colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were looking on the finger where the ring had been. "And I was just

going to send it back to him." She laughed a little nervously, pulling down her sleeve.

"So you were engaged to Walter Blakemore?" he said, with his teeth set, speaking his thoughts aloud rather than addressing the words to her.

She looked up indignantly, but his face frightened her. She had never seen that sort of anger in a man's face before.

"You have dared to trifle with me, tempting me to play the part of a blackguard!" he went on brutally, judging her. "What kind of woman are you, then? There is your mother; you do not need an escort." He was turning away.

Her eyes blazed. An anger as great as his own flamed and paled in her face. His stick lay on the basin ledge. She snatched it up.

"You coward!" she exclaimed, and struck him over the shoulder. Instantly the stick fell from her hand, and shame took the place of anger in her cheeks. She covered her face with her hands and leaned down against the wall of the fountain, silent, but trembling with the intensity of her emotions.

Nothing could have appealed to Mendenhall as did that impulsively, passionately-struck but forceless blow. The fact that it outraged all his ideas of feminine character and reserve made the piteousness of it the only thing upon which his mind could take hold, and he was conscious of a rush of penitent sympathy with the girl whom his savage contempt had beaten down in this way. He looked about him,

Fortunately there were no spectators of the incident. The nearest and only visible persons were Mrs Storey on the distant bench, and the children she was watching. He, was glad of that for her sake. He hesitatingly, timidly put his hand upon her arm.

"Don't touch me," she said, but as if the touch were a physical hurt rather than an indignity.

He withdrew his hand, saying in a low voice and pleadingly,—

"If I did not love you I could not so have insulted you."

She made no response, and he stood looking down upon her, waiting until she should lift her head. He entered upon a self-arraignment. What particular virtue in him gave him the right to judge this woman harshly? How came it that he assumed to have standards of honour and responsibility so much above those of men in general? Was it, after all, loyalty to principle and not a phase of egotism that made him resent her "trifling" with him? Was not his anger due to disappointed love more than to shock to those nice scruples concerning man's obligation to man which he had always imagined he possessed in eminent degree? Love was a free agent; and if love came to him, what business was it of his to inquire if someone else were the loser? Did the fact that another man loved this woman constitute an inviolable claim upon her before she had really surrendered her freedom of choice? What was an engagement more than an agreement to consider the

advisability of entering into a formal and definite contract? Why should he ascribe sanctity to that which the rest of the world regarded merely as a conditional convenience? Why should he not strive for a prize that was still a challenge to fair competition? Quixotisms had nothing to do with real men and women, with the actualities of practical life—and love was to seize upon its own wherever and whenever it could.

"I was a fool," he said suddenly, bending over her. "I was mad with jealousy. Punish me, but forgive me."

She raised her head, drawing her hands down over her cheeks to dry away the traces of tears, and stood before him, no longer either ashamed or angry, but calm, and he thought he read in the pallid and pained expression of her face an admission that gave him heart.

"You ask what kind of woman I am," she began.

"Don't speak of that," he interrupted protestingly. "Nothing you can say can make me feel more like a cad. I was a beast. Forgive me."

"I will tell you," she went on, as if he had not spoken. "I was in no way bound to Walter Blakemore. We were not engaged. That ring had no such significance. You have made it a betrothal ring. Get it for me."

She turned away and went in the direction of her mother, leaving him disconcerted and blank, because of her manner rather than her words.

He watched her crossing the space between him

and Mrs Storey, now in the sunlight, now in the shadow, and thought how little the careless grace of her movements indicated any perturbation of heart or mind. He saw by her actions when she joined her mother that she was telling of the loss of the ring, explaining why he remained at the fountain. Mrs Storey seemed of a mind to come to him, but Florence dissuaded her. Mrs Storey fluttered her handkerchief at him encouragingly, and the two went down the little path to the road as Mendenhall whistled and held up his stick to signal the playing children. Several boys came running to him.

"Can any of you dive?" he asked.

The boys exchanged glances of much inquisitiveness, the question struck them so oddly. Foreign visitors to Rome, especially English and American ones, are always enigmatical to the young bandits of the streets, they seem to have such peculiar ideas of entertainment. It was like this big, blond man to want to see them tumbling in this fountain against which he was leaning.

"Yes," said the tallest and slimmest of the boys, "we can all dive, but we are not going to—not in there," grinning sagaciously and pointing into the fountain.

"But I have dropped a ring in here, and I'll give you a gold piece if you get it."

"They would arrest me," said the boy, tempted by the offer, yet reluctant to let cupidity lead him into danger.

"A whole twenty lire piece," urged Mendenhall, showing the coin.

Two or three began flinging off their rags, but the tall boy was the first to climb upon the rim of the huge basin and plunge in where Mendenhall directed. After a number of unsuccessful efforts, during which the others clamoured to be let into competition, the ring was brought up with a handful of leafy deposit and triumphantly held out to Mendenhall.

Later in the day Florence received the jewel with the message, "When may I see you?"

The messenger brought back the answer,—

"When I send for you; but I thank you for recovering my ring."

"*My* ring!" he repeated, emphasising the pronoun in an unamiable way. "That is the end of it, then! I am to be sent for when I am wanted! Oh! very well! very well!"

But he sat down at his table and began writing. At the end of the four pages he stopped to read over what he had written. He then tore the paper into ribbons, kicked over his chair and lighted a cigar. A few inhalations helped him to an orderly train of thought, and he planted himself before one of the windows overlooking the street to follow it out.

It was not a very pleasant train of thought, but he was greatly annoyed when a knock at the door interrupted it. A valet came in to say that a gentleman had called to see the signor, and had sent up his card.

"I am not in to any one," said Mendenhall.

But he glanced at the card the valet had handed him. It bore the name of the Count Vasselli.

"Humph. You may show the gentleman up."

He smiled as he recalled the incident at Orteviti's in the night when he and Blakemore had been waylaid.

"What brings the old imbecile around at this late day?"

Count Vasselli came in with a curious mingling of dignity and affability—that cautiously polite manner in which one greets an acquaintance of whose identity he is uncertain.

Mendenhall received him good-humouredly.

"You are quite well again, Mr Mendenhall?"

"Quite well, I thank you, Count."

"They tell me you had a very serious affair?"

"Oh! it could easily have been worse."

"Do you know, sir, I was much amused when my friends came back from your hotel to tell me you were dying, the morning I sent them to you with my compliments?"

"Does a man's dying always amuse you, Count?"

"Oh! Maria, not at all! not at all! It was the idea of sending a challenge to a dead man that I found so comical. It put me into such a good humour that I immediately wrote you out an invitation to dine with me; but just as I was handing it to my servant, I remembered that it was no easier for a dead man to eat than to fight, and I

had another good laugh. I have to thank you for two of the pleasantest half hours I have had in years—two of the very pleasantest in years."

"I am sure I am very glad if I have been able to drift a little sunlight into your life, Count. And in what way can I contribute to your further happiness?"

"I should have called upon you before, but I've been in Naples. I returned only yesterday morning. In the first instance, I wish to tell you that I forgive you."

Mendenhall bowed with impressiveness.

"A gracious act, worthy of your nobility, Count."

"In the second instance, I wish you to dine with me to meet some friends on Thursday night."

"I am very sorry that it is impossible; but I leave Rome to-morrow."

"Leave Rome to-morrow! Not to be thought of! You must postpone your going until after my dinner!"

"I cannot do that."

"You mean you won't do that!" said the Count rising, half disposed to be irritated by the decision of Mendenhall's tone. "Shall I take your answer as a renewal of the affront you put upon me?"

Mendenhall rose gravely, and said, with a deferential gesture, and looking down to hide the smile in his eyes,—

"I do not believe you will do that, my dear

Count Vasselli, when I tell you that the interests of a lady are involved."

The Count was pacified at once. He bowed permissively.

"That gives the matter quite another aspect. I excuse you, but regretfully. However, my carriage is at the door. You must drive with me. You cannot refuse me that satisfaction."

"It will be an honour as well as a pleasure, Count."

"Much pleasanter than being run through with a sword, eh, Mr Mendenhall?"

The Count, in excellent agreement with himself, perked his head jauntily, and regarded Mendenhall with a smile of good-natured indulgence.

"I am persuaded, Count, that you would be a most chivalrous adversary. I have been told that your courtesy is so much greater than your resentments, that, though you have been principal in a score of duels, you have invariably forgiven rather than injure your opponent."

"I am peppery, Mr Mendenhall, and take offence easily, but I am charitable, and if I am quick in wrath, I am not slow to make allowance for the imperfections of my fellows. Besides, as soon as I find that a man will fight, I know that he is worth having as a friend."

Count Vasselli was, indeed, a jest of the clubs, for the headlong excitability of temper that hurried him into difficulties, that, threatening to terminate in

bloodshed, were usually dissolved in champagne. He had exchanged cards with half his acquaintances, but had never got beyond striking sparks from a rapier.

They took their places in the Count's open landau and were soon in the going and coming stream of carriages, which every afternoon moves leisurely along the Corso, and up into the Villa Borghese and back again in fashionable monotony. The Count, who was incessantly bowing, seemed vastly pleased that Mendenhall was fairly active in that respect, and took the trouble to felicitate him upon having dwelt so profitably in Rome. When the Queen drove by, the Count arose to his feet to bow with becoming ceremony, but he was not wholly inattentive to his companion. Resuming his seat he stared at Mendenhall in angry surprise.

"You did not salute her majesty!" he exclaimed.

Mendenhall had not seen the Queen. His eyes had been occupied with the occupants of the second carriage beyond. His mind was engaged with thoughts of Florence, and he had recognised her and her mother some distance away, so the royal carriage passed as an unimportant factor of the procession. His gaze was eagerly fixed on Florence's face. He saw her look in his direction, but she gave no sign of recognition. When they came nearer, just when the Queen was passing the Count's carriage, she looked at him a second time, and his hand went instinctively to his hat, but before he could

lift it, her eyes were turned in the opposite direction. A moment after the Count was railing at him, and she was passing by within reach of his hand should he stretch it out. Mrs Storey bobbed her head and smiled, and pantomimed to say that Mendenhall should be in the carriage with them.

"Don't get into a passion, my dear Count, I'll make amends. When we pass her majesty again I'll stand up with you."

The Count beamed upon him, and laid a hand familiarly upon his knee.

"You noticed it, eh? "They laugh at me a good deal for that. But I can't help it. It is automatic. *I* don't do it. I've found out what does it, though —it is the combination! You know queens hardly ever look like queens: Margherita does. And then you seldom see a really beautiful queen or princess. Margherita *is* beautiful. There you have it; it is the union of Queen and Beauty to which I rise; and I assure you, my dear gentleman, it is altogether outside of my control. Absolutely! And I'm glad of it!"

Mendenhall went to a concert that evening to "think it out." He cared little for music, and could scarcely distinguish between a Chopin nocturne and a Hungarian rhapsody, being as indifferent to one as to the other. Music was for him, he said, a besom to clear the cob-webs out of his mind and give thought a chance. Like Tennyson's girl with the water-jug, he "heard and not heard," his thoughts

having nothing to do with the sound of over-flow. He fancied his ideas were something like the acrobats at a varieties hall, who can only be brought into action by a flourish of fiddles. At any rate, he could never pull himself together, intellectually, half so well as when sitting under the influence of a good orchestra; and if he left the place ignorant of any and every feature of the programme, it was at least with his mind made up what to do in the matter debated.

Returned to his hotel he wrote a number of notes, one to Mrs Storey, packed his belongings, and by noon the next day was whirling along, if that may be said of Italian railway locomotion, on his way to London.

And that day Florence said to her mother, "Don't you think Rome is getting to be a bore?"

CHAPTER XV

"MONTE CARLO, *April* 5.

"DEAR WALTER,—We are, as you may see, inching our way back to Paris, though we haven't any idea when we shall get there. For my own part, I am in no hurry to quit this place. It is enchanting, and I am only sorry that you have been here, for I feel quite equal to a descriptive rhapsody that would stun you. But you need not conclude that it is the prismatic wickedness of the life here to which I have fallen an eager victim. It is the scene; though, of course, people are necessary to the perfection of a scene, and, *of course*, at Monte Carlo one must dance to the pipers, and that means a *soupçon* of some kind of naughtiness. Naturally one does not slight the Casino. We have become *habitues* of the most determined order, though we do not always play—it is so expensive.

"Mamma had what they call a run of luck the other day, and at one time was about 4000 francs ahead of the game (I believe that is the proper phrase). She had, however, some of that vaulting ambition which overleaps itself (a Shakespearianism which I *never* could understand), and came to grief

in her efforts to win 10,000. Between us we lost 1500 francs, though mamma insists that it was a loss of 5500 francs, for she *will* count in the 4000 she had for a little while. Now we are economizing to make up that extra. Isn't that like mamma?

"You ask me a great many questions in your letters. Questions requiring an answer are not legitimate to a friendly correspondence. They impose an annoying responsibility upon one of having the letters at hand to be consulted every time one has finished writing a paragraph. It is an abuse of good-nature A correspondence does not mean *answering* letters, it means *exchanging* them; otherwise it is in the nature of a business transaction. I don't keep your letters about me; indeed, I don't keep them at all. They charge for every pound of luggage in Italy, and they allow but little in France. I remember two of your last questions, however, and don't mind answering them. Mr Mendenhall is *not* with us. He has not been for some time. I don't know where he is. He probably has a reason for not having answered your letter. I should think you would express your wonder to him and not to me. That is the more sensible thing to do, isn't it?

"The other question is not so easily answered, because it has suspicious elements. I see no reason for calling on the Warleys or the Manderses if I 'stop long enough in Paris.' Your interest in them may be commendable without being weighty, as a reason for my being interested in them. I daresay

the Manders's boy merits all you say of him, and he may be the paragon of prodigies for anything I know to the contrary; but as I am a woman, I claim a woman's privilege of suspecting that it is the mother rather than the child from which your zeal draws fire. Don't imagine that I object in the least to that phase of it. I have no false notions as to the preponderance of Josephs in the social economy. To be downright candid with you, I've no great opinion of Josephs. But I do very decidedly object to being used as an instrument for stirring other people's chestnuts about over the coals. You need not feel called upon to reiterate your eulogies of the saintliness of Madame Manders. I take all that for granted. I allow that she is the one unblemished sheep in the Parisian fold, and that I might do well to bear frankincense and myrrh to her and her boy; but I am a Pharisee, and attach a great deal of importance to appearance, confessing my inability to grasp the spirit of things. I might have been content with giving you a simpler reason for answering your question in the negative, for, as a matter of fact, we are not to stop in Paris at all; but I don't care to have you entertain an erroneous idea as to the extent of my gullibility. A timely correction of your opinion may save you from future embarrassments, it being my observation that men are not what you might call geometrically exact liars. Their terms do not observe a common ratio of progression, and they are always betrayed by an excess.

"No; we shall not stop in Paris more than a fortnight. We are going straight to London, where we expect to arrive about the middle of May. We shall stop there until the 23d of June, and then—you are the first to receive this important and really momentous intelligence—*we are to sail for home!* You are probably not as much surprised as you ought to be, for papa wrote in his last letter (a desperately private one, which I have not yet shown to mamma) that he had told you of his intention to urge me to persuade mamma to come home. My persuasion consisted in declaring the fact of my determination to sail in June even if I had to hire a chaperon. You see I do have spasms of filial sober-mindedness which might answer for sympathy with the dear, stupid man; and I authorise you to soothe him with this bit of information, for I shall not have time to write two letters this week.

"Perhaps I should tell you before winding up this jumble of nonsense that I have committed what you may think an unpardonable indiscretion. Circumstances, which I do not think it necessary to recount, have made it advantageous for me to call your ring a betrothal ring. Though, as I have let you know before this, I look upon engagements as a kind of impeachment of a woman's character, marking her off as something set aside for future consideration, or taken on trial, I am willing to let you hold an option on me until we

have a chance to talk the matter over. This gives you a fine opportunity to 'decline with thanks,' but if you do anything so unimaginative and provincial, I shall have too much pity for you to be angry. I understand well enough that this amounts to a proposal for your hand, but as I have not the remotest idea of marrying you, you may put any construction you please upon my desire to make a temporary convenience of you.

"Papa says you are having a great deal of trouble settling up your father's estate, and that times are hard. Well, that may give you a taste for practical affairs, and cure you of your passion for dabbling in oils. After looking upon miles and miles of canvases painted by nobody but cataloguers knows who, I have come to the conclusion that the painting industry is overdone; and I would like to see you take up with something in which you could amount to something. Why don't you go in for politics? It isn't the most reputable business in the world, I believe, but it does admit of quick personal distinction, if one has an accommodating conscience. But you, I fear, belong to the accountable type of men. Good-bye. FLORENCE."

"PARIS, *May* 2.

"DEAR MR BLAKEMORE,—Is your arithmetic bad? or have you forgotten my terms? Your last cheque was for 200 francs too much, and I return you

that amount enclosed. It is true you wrote of extras; but there are no extras.

"I believe there is a good deal that I ought to write about to you, but I am such a wretched letter writer, it is very likely I won't know how to say it. In the first place, Manders is doing so well, that I begin to think he needs a better teacher. He takes to music as most boys take to mischief. I cannot keep him restrained, and he makes me feel that I am not up to him. He is not like a boy of eight at all. He seems twelve at least. His technique, of course, is not good, and he does not read new music very well, but he can play almost anything he hears played, and you will hardly credit me when I say that he improvises wonderfully. The objection is, that he prefers 'playing out of his head,' as he puts it. It is amusing to see how much in awe of him Mrs Manders has come to be. She does a great deal of sewing now, and she always sits in the room with her work when I am giving him his lesson, but I notice that her work stops, and she sits listening to him with a mixture of tears and smiles, as if she were afraid of something, and yet happy too.

"I wrote to you, did I not, that Mrs Manders has a troublesome cough? In my opinion it is even worse than it was, but when I suggest that she ought to see a doctor, she laughs and declares that it is nothing but a tickling in her throat, and that doctors are only a foolish luxury like carriages and lap-dogs

To be sure I don't think it is anything serious myself, but it is just as well to stop a cough in time. I have come to have a great respect for Mrs Manders. I never knew anyone so sweet-tempered and so always sunny. And she is the most industrious creature. There is never a sign of disorder in her rooms, and she keeps herself and Manders always *en dimanché*, as the French say. I don't know how she manages, for I cannot believe she is earning a great deal now, though she does some posing in addition to her sewing. She has changed my ideas about models. I used to think that none of them were respectable, and I sometimes doubted, in spite of what you said to my father, if Mrs Manders could be strictly proper. I know better now, and perhaps I should apologise to you and to her for ever having had opinions without some facts to go with them.

"This morning we had a call from Miss Florence Storey, who said she came at your request to ask about Mrs Manders and Manders. I offered to take her with me to see them, but she said she only had a few minutes to spare, and her mother was waiting outside in the carriage. I liked Miss Storey very much, and my father quite lost his heart to her. I told her everything I could about Mrs Manders, and finally she said, 'If it isn't very far, possibly I have got time to go with you to see them.' So they took me with them in the carriage, but I got the impression that Mrs Storey was not pleased. She stayed in the carriage.

I thought at first that Miss Storey had rather a cold and patronising way with Mrs Manders, but it did not last long. Mrs Manders seemed to know all about Miss Storey, and was so pleased with the call that she seemed a new being. You must not smile at me when I say that I thought she seemed *grateful*, though I don't know why she should have been. I am not a very intelligent observer. At first the two women regarded each other as curiosities, as it struck me, but I am sure they had good opinions of one another when they parted. I stopped to give Manders his lesson and let Miss Storey go down alone. After she had gone Mrs Manders, with more gaiety than I have ever seen in her, said to Manders,—

"'Come, my little one, before you begin your lesson we'll sing one of our old songs together,' and sat down at the piano. Do you know that Mrs Manders would sing well if she had some lessons? But she stopped in the very midst of the second verse and turned suddenly to me, saying,—

"'Is it really true, Miss Warley, that you are teaching Manders just for the love of it?'

"I am finding it very hard to keep up these deceptions, Mr Blakemore, and some day I am going to be found out, I know. I don't see any reason for them. Mrs Manders is sensible enough, I am sure, to appreciate what it means to Manders to have educational advantages which she cannot afford to give him, and I don't think she is too proud to accept benefits that Manders may some day be

able to repay with interest. Really now, is there any reason for this secrecy?

"I haven't written such a long letter since I was a schoolgirl, and I daresay I have left out everything that I started out to tell you. You must make allowances for me.—Sincerely,

"MATILDA WARLEY."

CHAPTER XVI

"YOUR father has lost his senses! It is madness, downright madness, to think of wanting us to come back to New Orleans in the blaze of summer! And who knows what we might have accomplished this season in London! Everything was in your favour! And yet you were as obstinate as he was imbecile! As if you didn't know that your father's perpetual whining about hard times and the tightness of the money market is only so much professional cant! And here we are blistering, and the air getting hotter and hotter with every turn of the engine wheels. I shouldn't be at all surprised if we were running headlong into yellow fever or the cholera! And I should not object in the least. It would serve him right!"

This was the frame of mind in which Mrs Storey returned to her spouse, and which they may excuse who have approached New Orleans by train under the mid-day glare of a July sun. Railway service in the South at that time was far from ideal, the coaches being uncomfortable and "stuffy," and ill-protected against sifting cinders and penetrating dust by badly-cased windows. The managers of

roads were apparently governed by the opinion that their mission in life was to do what they could for the annoyance of their not too numerous patrons. It was as if the train service were an additional punishment imposed upon the Southerners for having allowed themselves to be whipped out in the war, and reduced to a degree of poverty to which anything above the merest decencies of travel would be a criminal pampering. Negro equality, a legal fact though a practical myth, had its influence upon the governing orders, and before "through trains" between the North and the South came into use in obedience to the demands of in-rushing Northern enterprise, the aristocrat of the plantation days was forced to support his impoverished dignity by placarding one half of a common coach: "This portion reserved for whites."

Conditions had not so greatly improved for Mrs Storey's benefit that she could be much blamed if a sleepless night and an early morning change to a comfortless and hot day coach had prepared her temper for the mid-day eruption. Florence herself was dispirited enough to offer no defence of her father. She even sighed a little wearily as she said,—

"Well, please don't add anything to the heat, mamma. If we must be martyrs, let us try to be Christians."

But New Orleans was not as intolerable as they had anticipated. The Gulf breezes, taking account of Mrs Storey's coming, had blown in one of those

sudden downpours of purifying rain which turn the streets into temporary rivers and cool the air deliciously. The water runs knee deep while the downpour continues, but five minutes after it ceases there is nothing but the moist stones and the fresh, sweet air to tell of the sudden flood.

The carriage span of large black mules still reeked of their drenching as Mrs Storey and Florence were handed into the old-fashioned barouche that had been the family carriage as long as Florence could remember, but the rain had stopped and the sky was blue. Released from the train, and joyously welcomed by her agreeably deferential husband, and fanned by a breeze that smelled of wet roses, Mrs Storey was enough appeased to be amiable. She even held out her hand to the coachman, who had been a "born slave" of Mr Storey's father, and had wisely refused to avail himself of the freedom he did not know how to use.

"We are back again, you see, Uncle Jerry," she said, as he took her hand in the proprietory way common to the old family servants in the South.

"Lawd! I can't believe ye, Miss Leshy! But I'se right glad you is! An' Miss Flaw'nce, how you do look, honey! Them furrin parts agrees wi' you folks, Miss Leshy—dey do, indeed!"

Mrs Storey's name was Felicia, and she was "Miss Leshy" to the blacks, from pickaninnies to ancients of Jerry's years.

In the drive to the house in St Charles Street,

there were exchanges of glances between Florence and her father that conveyed no small amount of intelligence from one to the other. Mr Storey was saying in this way all that the lively and voluble presence of Mrs Storey prevented him putting into articulate speech. Interpreted, the conversation was to this effect,—

"I believe we perfectly understand each other, my dear?"

"Perfectly," Florence replied.

"You had some trouble to bring it about, I suppose?"

"Well, rather."

"I'm ever so much obliged to you. It meant some sacrifice on your part, too, didn't it, my girl?"

"That is hardly worth mentioning."

"I'm afraid this good nature of your mother's doesn't go very deep."

"I wouldn't put too much confidence in it."

"I dread thinking of my first hour alone with her."

"You ought to be pretty well used to it by this time."

"Can't you manage to stick by me? I'd rather have it out in your presence."

"I'll do what I can for you."

"The fact, is my dear Flo, I had to do it. Things are worse than you think."

Florence found that she had accumulated a large reserve of sympathy with her father in the drive home, and when she got into the house she did what

she had neglected to do at the station—threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Thank you, Flo," he whispered in her ear, "I was feeling the need of that."

It was not until the evening, an hour after dinner, that the interview, for which Mr Storey had been fortifying himself apprehensively during a month, was unlimbered against him. Left to himself, and cheered by the delusion that the ladies would busy themselves with unpacking, Mr Storey stretched himself on the leather-covered lounge in the library, his stone jar of crumbed Virginia leaf on the table beside him, his mahogany-coloured, long-stemmed meerschaum pipe alight in his mouth, a well-fed calm shining from his half-closed eyes, a canopy of blue-grey film wavering in soothing assurance above his head. As the tranquillising influence of the tobacco increased, his thoughts, less and less anxious, drifted into a languorous reverie which was very like unto sleep when Mrs Storey came briskly into the room.

"Oh! here you are. I thought you had gone out. Am I disturbing you?"

"Not in the least, Felicia," Mr Storey responded, as cordially as one sharply aroused from drowsiness may. "I am only too glad to see you," rising to a sitting posture as he spoke. "Sit down by me and tell me what you've been doing since the last time we had a chat together."

"I am not in the reminiscent vein this evening,

Henry. My interest now is in finding out what you meant by breaking up my plans at the very time they looked the most promising."

"Your plans for what, my dear?"

"Don't play the *ingénu*, Henry. But I'll spare you the necessity of floundering about among your pitiable subterfuges. My eyes were opened when that basket of flowers came from Walter Blakemore this afternoon. So you entered into a conspiracy with that young gentleman to play upon Florence's sympathies and make a fool of me? Exactly like you! I only wonder that I was too stupid to see through your miserable scheme in time to defeat it. But your triumph shall be short-lived, that I promise you; and if Walter Blakemore comes here to-night—"

"He is not in New Orleans."

"But the flowers?"

"Telegraphed. Come now, Felicia, let's have a sensible talk. You are on the wrong track entirely. The whole thing in a nutshell is that we've got to retrench."

"Retrench! I hate the word, Henry. It is ill-sounding and ill-meaning and mean-spirited. I never knew a babbler about retrenchment who had anything to retrench. That is the cant phrase of cheap politicians who are struggling to get their hands into the public purse."

"My dear," Mr Storey broke in with more than his usual firmness, and putting his pipe on the table, "you may choose your own words, but here are the

facts. Everything has gone against me this year, both here and in New York. I'm a million out, and I have reached bed rock. I haven't five thousand left in bank, and unless there comes a turn in the New York wheat market pretty soon I'm a ruined man."

"Ruined!" cried Mrs Storey, aghast. "Does that mean that you have lost Florence's fortune, too?"

Mr Storey looked at his wife wonderingly, a pained smile coming slowly to his lips. Use Florence's money in speculation? Cheat the girl whose future security and happiness were his only ambition? He picked up his pipe and relighted it without replying.

Mrs Storey quite understood, and was in a measure comforted. There was nothing so very dreadful to fear as long as Florence had half a million. Her asperity returned upon her.

"What business had you fooling around the New York wheat markets? You were a cotton and tobacco broker, and knew what you were about as long as you stuck to your proper vocation! Why couldn't you let good enough alone?"

"I should have been very glad to do that if you had been satisfied with 'good enough,' my dear Felicia. But you can't keep a house in Washington, a villa at Newport, and do the fashionable in Europe on a cotton broker's income. You made speculation necessary, my dear."

"*I* made it necessary! I beg of you not to try to put the responsibility for your business shortcomings upon my shoulders, Mr Storey. If you were weak

enough to make a fool of yourself, do have the manliness to bear the blame of it. *I* am not the head of the family!"

"It cost us one hundred and ten thousand dollars to live last year, and I made less than fifty thousand dollars.

"Well?"

"I am going to keep our living inside of my income after this."

"And that means—?"

"The sale of the Washington and Newport properties, and economy at home."

Florence appeared in the doorway.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Yes," said Mrs Storey; "I think we need your advice."

A family conference ensued, the first of the kind in which Florence had part. The situation was reviewed in detail, and the embarrassed condition of Mr Storey's affairs made clear.

"I am glad of it," Florence said at the conclusion of the summing up. "It is going to give us the chance to show some common sense and live like intelligent people. I am tired enough of trotting around like a prize animal looking for the highest bidder, and I welcome the opportunity to get out of the cattle market. I shouldn't be at all sorry if you went quite to smash, papa. We might live happily together then, and we would at least know what sort of friends we have."

Deserted by Florence in this way, Mrs Storey, crowding back the rebellious tears sent up by humiliated pride, confessed to having lived in vain, and avowed that mothers who give thought and heart-beats solely to the consummation of brilliant plans for a daughter's future are typified in history by Niobe, whom grief turned to stone after an access of maternal disappointment.

In reality Mrs Storey was not an unreasonable woman, and though she held to the opinion that Mr Storey was altogether too radical and arbitrary in his calculations of things necessary to be done, she acquiesced in the plans for the future with a certain grace when she was convinced that Florence was in earnest about wanting to settle down quietly for a time. It was agreed that the Washington and Newport places should be disposed of, that the Charles Street house should be kept for the winter residence, and that this summer should be passed quietly at one of the Gulf coast towns to which New Orleans people resorted in the hot months.

In the course of a week they decided on Balouis, and selected an old-fashioned, one-storey, rambling plantation house backed by a grove of live oaks, having a rose garden of rich variety at one side, the climbing roses embowering one wing of the house, and with a close line of tall flowering oleanders screening the front lawn from the road which followed the windings of the bay. Florence had chosen the house, being curiously attracted to it by the name "Waldmeer"

done in white-painted horseshoes diagonally across the street gate, and it was her privilege to furnish it from town in accordance with her own ideas, which made much of white muslin curtains, cool yellow mattings, rattan chairs and divans, plentifully supplied with light cushions, white-framed, delicate water-colours, and hammocks swung across the porches or between neighbourly trees that overshadowed the house.

"Where did you get such notions of virginal simplicity?" Mrs Storey asked a little satirically but not too much displeased.

"Well, this is the first time I've felt at home in ten years," Mr Storey declared heartily on his first evening in the house after it was "settled."

Mr Storey came the fifty miles from New Orleans by the late afternoon train every day, being met at the station by the ladies with the mules and carriage, for the drive over the smooth, shell road, along the fine sweep of the bay, was the evening recreation of the fortunate summer residents of the village, who insisted on a picturesquely showy display in that delightful period of the day, when the sun was just lazing down behind the tops of the pine woods, and the breezes were chasing in from the blue reaches of the gulf. The nights, their large-starred, velvet-like sky seeming but a little more than arm's length above the head, offered peculiar charms to loiterers on the beach or on the long, bench-equipped private piers that extended a thousand or more feet into the tide

waters of the bay. When the tide went out, bare-legged and half-clad bronzed men and girls and boys—Italian and French and "Creole"—waded in the shallows, holding aloft cressets of flaming "fat pine," picking up the soft shell crabs or spearing flounders for the morning sales from house to house, making a weirdly fascinating spectacle Florence never wearied of watching. There was moonlight boating and early morning fishing, and afternoon haunting of woods, diversion enough of many kinds besides the inevitable social phases of idling life in a select resort, so that Mrs Storey soon came to a poise of mind which persuaded her that simple gowns and roses for jewels are not incompatible with happiness. Mr Storey, who had not known such wholesome recreation from the cares of business in years, began to get round of face and elastic of step, undergoing such a process of rejuvenescence that he fell into a sort of temerity of conduct towards Mrs Storey, and picked up his long-abandoned habit of calling her "Leshy," after the fashion of the negroes.

Several hundred yards back of the house proper, in a semi-clearing in the oak grove, was a quaint cottage which Florence fitted up as a "bachelors' rest," for the accommodation of her gentlemen friends who might from time to time come out to stop with them from Saturday to Monday, a spirit of hospitality that did not go unrewarded. Blakemore, who had already taken a studio in New York and was waiting to begin work when the affairs of his father's estate,

which was not as large as had been imagined, should be settled, came down from New York for a fortnight. Mr Storey would not hear of his going to the hotel as he had intended, but insisted on installing him in the "bachelors' rest," to the secret annoyance of Mrs Storey, who, however, put on the outward show of friendliness.

Blakemore had come to Waldmeer prepared to exercise over Florence those indefinable rights of possession which every "engaged" young gentleman believes to be guaranteed him upon his entrance into the probationary state of bliss. Florence seemed to have an altogether erroneous view of the situation, and adopted tactics that made another Tantalus of him, dangling the sweets of intercourse just safely out of his reach, and keeping him in expectant uncertainty as to the turn her caprices of mind were likely to take. He resolved to make a virtue of boldness. After a thoughtful pause in one of their purposeless conversations at the end of the pier, he asked abruptly,—

"When are we going to be married?"

"Not until you amount to something," she answered promptly, in matter-of-fact way.

"You believe in perpetual engagements, then?" he asked.

"Oh! I don't think you are without possibilities," she said seriously, not following his humorous lead; "but I am not so sure that you will develop them. I am certain you would not if you wait to set about it until you are married."

"Why do you say that? Marriage is the thing to bring a man to himself."

"That, of course, depends on the man."

"Or on the woman," he urged in amendment.

"Not at all," she answered decisively, "at least not in the sense you mean. It is true a woman may be a hindrance or an assistance to the man she marries, but she can be an assistance only when the man is the really dominant force and capable of going ahead in spite of the woman. In a case of that kind the woman, if she has character enough to be self-denying, and devotion enough to identify herself intelligently with her husband's ambition, can undoubtedly strengthen his purpose, and that is all she can do. But if the man be naturally irresolute or only half in earnest, an average woman would simply close the door of possibilities against him, for an average woman is merely a dependence, and therefore an encumbrance that makes for the commonplace."

"I don't agree with you. But if it were so, what has that to do with you and me?"

"Shall I answer you frankly?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Well, then, to be candid with you, I don't think, as between you and me, that you are the really dominant force. I think I am the stronger of the two."

He laughed. "Well, I am perfectly willing you should be; but what makes you think you are?"

"Observation, my dear Walter, and some experience with you. You are a planner, an undertaker,

a beginner; you are not a finisher. You are one of those easy, good-natured men who find it difficult to realise that concentration and a certain element of exclusive selfishness are necessary to any kind of success that is worth while. If you had a wife you would be domestic, and be without enough ambition to command your energies, especially as you are in no danger of having to work for your living."

"You misjudge me, Florence."

"I don't think so. Are you going to stick to painting?"

"Why, yes; I think so. That seems to be my avocation."

"There are no avocations. A man determines his own vocation. But I'm beginning to doubt that even painting has any very strong hold upon you."

"Come, now, Florence? Why do you say that? I am passionately fond of painting. God knows, I've worked hard enough to get hold of it!"

"Well, I can't find out that you have ever finished anything—"

"But I have!" he interrupted eagerly. "I have just finished something that I believe is worth while."

"What is it?"

"A portrait."

"Something you began in Paris?"

"Yes."

"A lady? Madame Manders, I suppose?"

"She posed for it; but it is your face."

"Ah! you make such combinations, do you?"

"I think it really a striking likeness. I am sure you will like it."

"I am not so sure. Don't you think it time we were going in? Father will be coming down with a lantern in the moonlight to look for us presently. It is funny how little confidence papa has in the moon."

He was conscious of a forced lightness in her manner, but could not account for it. He understood, however, that she had warned him off a too personal ground, and they walked up the pier in silence. When they had crossed the road she paused with her hand on the gate-latch.

"Do you know, it has been a disappointment to me that you should be here nearly two weeks without once seeming to have been struck with the artistic values of Waldmeer? That is one thing that makes me doubt your having the true artist temperament."

"But I have been struck with them, and if I had the time I should make some studies of several effective bits, possibly with you somewhere in the scene."

"Then why not take the time?" looking saucily at him.

"I shall—when I return in September."

"Oh! you are coming back then?"

"Yes, if you are to be here."

"And why not before?"

"I have accepted commissions to paint two portraits."

"Really!"

"Yes; and I am to have good pay for them too."

"Indeed! Well, perhaps you are going to change my opinion of you."

"I hope not altogether," he said, following her in through the gateway.

CHAPTER XVII

'IT is my opinion," said Mère Pugens, discontentedly, to a neighbour with whom she was gossiping over a friendly glass of absinthe in her favourite *cabaret*, "It is my opinion Paris has not such another fool as our Marie Manders."

"You think so, Mère Pugens?"

"I do, neighbour. She is starving on pease porridge at ten francs a week when she might as well have a hotel in the fashionable quarter, like my Lizette, and enjoy the comforts of a gentlewoman. If she hasn't any ambition for herself she owes something to the boy. It is true she gives everything to him and keeps nothing for herself; but what of that when she holds from him so much that he might have! And what is it all for? Ask her if you care to laugh. 'I wish to live respectable for my boy's sake!' Was ever such idiocy? As if there could be anything as respectable as plenty of money and the things that go with it! I feel sorry for the little imbecile, and have offered a thousand times since her lover ran away and left her to take her to Lizette, who is just now beginning to feel the need of having a young face to take about with her. Not that I am thinking of Lizette.

Heaven be praised, she needs no meddling from me. I don't know where she got her wisdom. Pugens was a sot, and my brains were none too lively; but Lizette—Lord bless you! she used to stop nursing to laugh at things she thought of. She would make a woman of Marie in a fortnight. But I'm afraid, neighbour, the poor child will go on being a fool to the end, and I'm thinking the end is not so far away. It is pitiful the way she has gone off in the past year."

Mère Pugens sighed, shook her head dolorously, and sought relief of feeling in several extra sips of absinthe.

Back of her ill-directed thought there was a genuine and well-meaning sympathy. Her coarse nature had many kindly fibres, which vibrated tenderly when Marie was in her mind, especially now that she saw Marie making an unequal battle against conditions which she, Mère Pugens, thought had no sort of right to exist.

Marie had gone to M. Monier to offer her services again as a model. The old master eagerly welcomed the offer, but when she stipulated that she should not be asked to pose for the nude he supposed she jested, and good-humouredly railed at her.

"Oh! dearie, dearie! hide such a figure and make us do with that pretty doll's head, as if we were all Correggios doing infants? That would never do in the world, my child! Come, come, you have no reason yet to be ashamed of your figure, my beauty."

Finding her in earnest, he seriously undertook to dissuade her from sacrificing art to artificial scruples, proposing, if she objected to class work, to get her excellent engagements for private posing. But Marie, with such a smile as he could not understand, shook her head, declining to engage for anything but costume work. She began to realise now that those old jests of the students which she had treated so lightly were not jests at all. Dimpled chins and infantine eyes have no great value in mature art schemes. Some employment she found, indeed, but, clothed and in her right mind, her field of usefulness was necessarily limited; yet if they had looked more attentively, looking through the surface into the deeps below it, they would have seen as the days went by that something was coming up into the doll face to counteract its dimple, something that would make it worth while to paint. But he is a great man whose brush dips below the surface; it requires a Velasquez or a Murillo to see mystery in the serene face of a child. Marie's lot was cast with the moderns, moderns who paint the nude for its nakedness, leaving it as naked as they find it, and her fifty and forty francs a week went down to thirty and twenty and ten before a year was done, and plain sewing for cheap shops became a supplementary ill-paid labour.

Manders was kept for a long time in ignorance of any change in their material affairs, so artful was Marie in her economies. He was aware, however,

of an increased devotion on her part, and though he was unable to analyse the character of this tenderness, he felt the influence of a new dignity, a poise, a precision in her maternal attitude, and to his adoration of her was added a respect, as he somehow realised that she, rather than he, was the stronger now. Marie was hardly conscious of the transitions in herself at which Manders vaguely wondered. She did not know that the pressure of maternal responsibility within circumstances of privation and self-denial was fashioning her anew; but she did know that a strange contentment nearly akin to happiness grew out of this battling to keep Manders well clad, well fed and happily ignorant of the hardships with which she had to contend. Mère Pugens saw only the struggles; she was blind to the rewards, and therefore could not understand that Marie was far from being an object of pity. But the old woman was alive to the growing gravity of the face in which she thought she discerned a wearing sorrow, and, though not appreciating, confessed the womanliness, the intelligent positiveness which were taking the place of the one-time helpless ingenuousness. Mère Pugens believed she knew the very hour that set the change in motion. It was a year ago. Blakemore, whose father had just died, wrote to Captain Warley authorising him to dispose of such effects in the apartment in the Rue Danfert-Rochereau as were not to be sent to America. In this letter he said it was doubtful if he would be in Paris for several years to come, as the

settling of his father's estate, the invalidism of his mother, and his formal setting up as an artist "with something serious to do" made it desirable that he stop at home. He gave particular directions for the packing and forwarding of the nearly-finished painting of Marie, on which he had been so hopefully engaged, and which he was resolved to finish as a masterpiece, playfully underscoring the word with several strong lines.

Marie had taken Manders to the first day's sale of the household goods at auction, and Mère Pugens, who stood by, observed, with many self-satisfied waggings of the head, that Marie more than once furtively dried her eyes, and, when she learned that the picture was not to be sold, slipped away, leaving Manders with Mère Pugens. No cleverness is required to put two and two together to make a sum of four, and the good shopwoman fancied she knew the signs of a bleeding heart as well as any woman in Paris. Her indignation rose against Blakemore, and she was unwilling that others should live in ignorance of her opinions concerning him, particularly Marie. She climbed Marie's stairs that evening to deliver a tirade against a sex to whose perfidy the world owes all its abominations. She was dumfounded, therefore, when Marie said, with unaccustomed firmness,—

"You must never speak to me in this way about M. Blakemore. He is the best friend I have."

But as the months went by Mère Pugens was

less and less disposed to find truth in the declaration. This day, then, when the talk with her neighbour over their absinthe had, as she imagined, fortified her mind with incontrovertible arguments, Mère Pugens went determinedly to Marie, and, unmindful of opposition, summed up the situation to the reproach of Marie.

"It is a shame for you to be slaving your life away in this beggerly manner because a miserable thing of a man that you ought to despise has abandoned you to poverty."

This was the gist of her loquacious wrath, and Manders, forgotten in the room beyond, heard and understood her. He sat very still, some toys clutched in his hand, his face pale, his lips quivering, as he listened; and he sat so for many minutes after Mère Pugens had gone, listening to something that sounded like stifled sobs in the other room. When these sounds were silenced, and he heard Marie moving about again, he went to her, holding out to her the toys.

"You may put these away, maman," he said; "I am not going to play with them any more."

"Not play with them any more! Why, my little one?"

"I am not a baby now," he said.

She stooped and kissed him. The little lips were very cold, she thought, and something of fear touched her. She offered to take him on her lap. There was someone singing and playing in the street.

"No," he said, "I am going down to hear the music."

He put his arms about her waist. His head came up to her breast. He laughed a little.

"You see I am almost as big as you are," he said, kissed her, and ran out of the door.

He knew these street musicians. They were familiars of the neighbourhood, the man's voice a well-trained but broken baritone that had been heard, no doubt, long ago otherwhere than in the streets, the woman's voice a quavering soprano, that seemed to have its memories, too, of better days. Marie and Manders had loved to listen to them, thinking they sang right well, and had thrown down sous to them from the high window gratefully. Their accompanying instrument was an accordion, somewhat pleasantly subdued by age. They had moved further along the street when Manders got to them, and he followed them in their second remove, waiting until they were again ready to move on. Then, giving a two-sou piece to the man as they walked along, he said,—

"I can sing, too, monsieur."

"Ha! and better than I can, I daresay, my little man, eh?"

"Perhaps," Manders answered, looking up and smiling frankly.

"Do you hear him, wife?" the man said, greatly pleased. "Is he not a pretty braggart? And who taught you to sing, my master?"

"God, monsieur."

"Then, in God's name, sing, my boy, and I'll play for you."

The woman laughed, but the man was serious. He put his hand on the lad's head.

"You are right to say that; it is God who teaches the true singer. Well, come, let us hear if you are one of His children. Sing; I'll follow you."

Manders began singing, the man accompanying him. The people passing paused with the crowd of children. The narrow street was soon blockaded, and Manders was singing alone, for the man had stopped playing. When the song was ended Manders looked up at the man in surprise.

"But you were not playing, monsieur."

"No, I was not playing, monsieur," said the man, with singular respect.

There was applause, "bravos" and "encores," as well as the clapping of hands, the woman passing through the crowd holding out her cup for the sous.

"Will you sing again, monsieur?" asked the man at last.

"If you wish," Manders replied, smiling.

"Un petit Mario," said the man to the crowd when Manders had finished his second song, and taking the coin of the two collections he poured it into the lad's cap, saying,—

"They are all yours, monsieur. I would not keep a sou of them if I were famishing, and, praise God, I do not lack."

"But I want to sing again with you to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after," Manders objected, offering to return the money.

"And so you shall, and whenever you please. That we may arrange for when you come again; but to-night, monsieur, you are my guest," spoken with a bow and a grace of manner surely not learned in the streets.

The crowd very much approved, and Manders sang again before closing his cap like a purse about his earnings and speeding back to Marie, who would have begun to wonder at his absence.

Entering the room where she was sewing, Manders thrust his heavily-weighted cap into her lap with an affectation of solemn indifference that did not wholly deceive her as to his excited state of mind.

"There is something for you," he said carelessly.

She held apart the sides of the cap, looking in curiously, and exclaiming with half-fearful astonishment,—

"Money! What have you been doing?'

"Singing."

In spite of him a triumphant note leaped out with the word. He knew himself betrayed. No good of further pretence. He flung his arms round her neck and abandoned himself to his joy. He gave her no time to ask questions or interpose objections until he had run through the experience of the hour and given it an enthusiastic application to the possibilities of their future.

"I'll make you rich, maman! They are going to love to hear me sing! And when I sing they'll pay! Old Antoine said so!"

She shared none of this enthusiasm. Terror played with her heart-strings.

"You have been singing in the streets?"

"Yes; and I'm going to do it regularly now."

He grew smaller and smaller in her eyes. It was her baby-boy again, and he singing in the streets! The streets, with their perils, their many perils and dangers; and he going here and there throughout them, threatened by their dangers, touched by their vice!

"I cannot let you do this," she said; "I am very angry with you." But her anger was pitifully near to tears.

"Then count the sous," he replied gaily, taking up a handful and beginning to count them himself, noisily, that he might not hear her remonstrances.

He put the sous in heaps of twenties, saying now and then, "I can't count if you talk, maman," but keeping on industriously until his task was done and verified.

"Look there, maman! a hundred sous and a half franc piece! Five francs and a half in an hour! And you scolding! You should be dancing about and clapping your hands! You ought to be very glad and proud that I can earn so much money so easily!"

"I am proud and glad that you have a voice

the people love so well to hear. But, my boy, my pretty little boy, must not sing in the streets, and I do not need to have him earn money for me. I can earn for both. By-and-by, when he is big, he may earn for me."

She stroked the curls back from his forehead, smiling to see what seemed to her a look of disappointment in his eyes. It was not disappointment, however, as she understood when, steadily gazing into her face, he said, the tremor of mastered feeling in his voice,—

"I heard what Mère Pugens said to you a while ago." A drooping of the head by ever so little and a lowering of the eyelids on Marie's part. She said nothing. She knew there was an end of protest. The question was settled. Manders was master. Manders knew it as well as she, and he relented. He put up his arms to caress her, saying consolingly,—

"Only in the evenings, maman, when I have come home from school. I shall tell old Antoine that. And you know old Antoine will take good care of me. It is going to be great fun."

So Manders became a street minstrel, finding it not all fun, for there were foot-weariness and cold and rain and a tightness in the throat sometimes, and there were seldom five francs to his portion when the last song was sung in the street below Marie's windows. But none of the heartaches or weariness came home to Marie. He brought laughter and gladness and triumph to her, rattling his sous down upon the table

with so much satisfaction, counting them over with such pride of doing that Marie came by degrees to be as merry and as happy as he over their evening accounts, and to call him proudly "Monsieur le pourvoyeur." And she was so gay with him, he did not notice, as the winter wore on, that the roses and the roundness were going from her cheeks; he could not imagine that in her lonely hours she sometimes put aside her work through lassitude and lay upon her bed languorously waiting to hear his steps upon the stair to revive her energy. The welcome he expected was never wanting. The smile he loved to see as he came into the candle-light was always on her lips. Her words were never without the tender lightness that filled his heart with contentment. He knew nothing of ebbing vitalities. He had not learned yet that the smile of summer is the burning out of the year's life. All is well where laughter is, in a child's philosophy; and where was sweeter laughter than Marie's?

But Mère Pugens and Miss Warley, too, saw with worldlier eyes, and the one was angry and the other sighed. Down there in the Midi was the breath of regeneration, if, as the one argued, folly were not a self-willed blindness, if, as the other thought, poverty were not a tyrant.

And one day in the mid-April this clear-sightedness came to Manders in the sunshine of the Luxembourg. The chestnuts were just spreading out the delicate green folds of their fan-like leaves, and the garden was thronged with children and their elders

rejoicing in the soft freshness of the warm air. It was the end of the Easter holidays, and Marie, finding no good excuse to plead, had consented to come down in the morning for a frolic among the reappearing beauties of the garden. Manders rebuked her want of animation, and laughed at her when she sank down on to the first bench they came to, professing herself tired.

"It is so warm walking, dearie," she said, with a strange little smile of apology.

But he humoured her, and sat beside her, watching the children at their games.

Presently she drew her cape closely about her, coughed, and said faintly, with a shiver,—

"I am so cold."

The sun blazed hot upon them.

He looked up into her face to laugh at her, but a chill went through him.

"Oh!" he said in scarcely more than a whisper.

CHAPTER XVIII

MÈRE PUGENS had hardly got her shop open the following morning and her papers ranged on the exterior shelves under the window when Manders, haggard as one who had kept a long, hard vigil, came hurrying in, too preoccupied with a fixed idea to think of greeting her.

"Who is the best doctor, Mère Pugens?"

"Has anything happened?" she asked, rising anxiously.

"No," he answered to her great comfort.

Then she went on in her usual way, thinking to soothe his childish fears,—

"Bless your heart, little one, there are many of them. And the best doctors are not always the ones that do the most good. One doctor is as good as another for some things, for there are some things for which none of them are any good at all—except for their cheapness. Now there is Monsieur Wimphen just round the corner—"

"But who is the best?" interrupted Manders impatiently, and turning toward the door.

"Well, there is Monsieur Besnard, in the Boulevarde St Germaine, near the Rue de Bac, who, everybody knows, was called into the Louvre at the time—"

But Manders had only waited for the name and address, and was down the street at a run before Mère Pugens had come to the end of her sentence. He abated nothing of his pace until he arrived at the Rue de Bac and breathless inquired of a footman which was the residence of the Doctor Besnard. He rang the bell of the mansion and entered into a court as the door opened as if automatically, and stood there waiting, uncertain which way to go. A servant appeared and demanded his business, smiling in a superior way when Manders declared his wish to see the doctor. Doctor Besnard was hardly at the call of unknown urchins who came panting in from the streets.

"Who sent you?"

"I came myself," said Manders; "it is necessary that I see Doctor Besnard myself," he continued insistently.

"He has no time. You must go, unless you tell me who it is wants the doctor." The man put his hand on Manders's shoulder and moved him toward the door.

Manders, with a quick movement, slipped from the servant's grasp and ran back into the centre of the court, looking up at the windows and calling out desperately with all the power of his lungs,—

"Doctor Besnard! Doctor Besnard!"

The servant followed angrily to retake him, clutched him by the arm, and was dragging him, struggling

and still calling, toward the door when Doctor Besnard looked out from a first floor window.

"What is it, Joseph?" he demanded.

"Let me speak to Doctor Besnard," called out Manders, pitifully, addressing himself to the benevolent face at the window.

"Bring the boy up, Joseph," said the doctor, and retired into the room.

"What is it you wish?" asked the doctor, kindly, when Manders came before him.

"My maman is ill. You must come to see her right away."

The child's manner pleased him.

"And who is your maman, my lad? Where does she live.

"Madame Manders. She lives in the Rue St Jacques, the fourth floor, to the right; I'll show you the way."

"And who is to pay me?" an amused smile on the lips of the doctor not used to seeking patients in the Rue St Jacques.

"I shall pay you, monsieur."

The doctor looked into the young firm face upraised to his so confidently. It was not a face to laugh into, and the smile went away from his lips. But he said again,—

"I haven't the time, my lad. I'll send you to someone who will do as well, and who will not charge you so much. You know they say I rob my patients, and I should not want to rob you."

"But I have the money to give you. You will not have to rob me. It is all yours if you will make my maman well. Here it is — ten francs, monsieur."

He took from his pockets the sous and silver pieces that were his earnings for the last four days and heaped them on the table.

"You may count them. There are quite ten francs."

"Ah! ten francs is a good deal of money, my boy. I should not want as much as that. I'll take my share."

He gravely counted out two francs in sous, shoving the rest toward Manders, and rang the bell. Joseph appeared.

"At what hour is my first engagement this morning, Joseph?"

"Eleven o'clock, monsieur."

"Plenty of time. Order the carriage. I'll go with you to see your maman, my lad."

When they entered her room, Marie, who had risen to meet Manders, fixed a startled, half-terrified look upon the doctor, and sank down, trembling, upon her bed. She realised that Manders had found out her secret. Doctor Besnard had no need to ask questions. His experienced eye diagnosed the case at once.

"Madame, your boy thinks that I should have a talk with you, and scold you a little, perhaps. Well, run away, my child, for half an hour. Then I'll tell you what we must do."

Manders went down the stairs. Doctor Besnard drew up a chair beside Marie, in whose eyes the tears were gathering, and took her hand. Very gentle and paternal and comforting of presence was Doctor Besnard.

"And you know, madame?" he asked after a time.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered, the tears falling, though there was a faint smile on the lips.

"And you know what brought it about?" She cast down her eyes, making no answer. "I am your physician, you know. You must be frank with me."

"In the winter, a year ago, I passed a whole night on the quais—" She hesitated.

"Thinking of the water?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But remembering your boy?"

"Oh! yes, yes, monsieur—remembering my boy!" covering her face with her hands and weeping unrestrainedly.

"And then the cough began?"

"Then the cough began."

He studied her in silence for some time, then said,—

"There is something besides the cough. Are you in sorrow? Are you grieving?"

"No, monsieur."

"Are you sure?"

"There is nothing, monsieur — only — only the thought of leaving my boy."

"No; that thought would make for health. It is

not that. There is a disappointment? A heart-hunger, madame?"

"No, nothing like that." But her hand warmed in his clasp.

"I thought so," he said to himself, but he knew she would make no admission, and he felt his helplessness.

"A happy heart and a peaceful mind," he said, "would do more for you than all the medicines in the world."

Manders had not returned when the doctor rose to go.

"I'll come to see you again," he said, bidding her good-bye. And going down the stairs, which seemed to him steep and dismal, he said, "I'll come for the boy's sake. I'll earn my two francs—but it is robbery after all."

Manders was waiting at the bottom of the stairs. He looked up mutely into the doctor's face.

"It is all right, my little man," said the doctor, cheerily. "But you must be very happy where she is. Make her laugh all you can. But she mustn't go up and down these stairs for a while. Yet you must live. Ten francs won't last for ever. How will you get any more if the maman cannot work?"

"I can earn plenty, monsieur."

"And how old are you, my lad?"

"I shall be eight next month."

"Eight! And what can you do to earn so much money?"

"Sing, monsieur."

Doctor Besnard's thumb and finger were on a gold piece in his waistcoat pocket as he looked at the lad, but he did not draw it forth. He put out his hand instead as man to man, and said, as Manders took it,—

"Sometime I should like to hear you sing."

That afternoon, when Manders met Antoine and his old wife at the appointed place, he said,—

"I am not going to sing with you any more after to-day."

"You are to stop singing!" exclaimed Antoine, protestingly.

"No, I'm not to stop singing, but I'm going to sing alone. I want to make all the money I can for myself."

Antoine gazed at him stupefied. The old woman laughed jeeringly.

"I knew how it would be," she said, "the little egotist! I've seen his airs! Never smiling when the people applauded. Tears in his eyes sometimes, too. Spiteful because there were not sous enough! It is a thousand pities when the soul of a miser gets into a child! Good riddance! good riddance! let him go now, Antoine! He has spoiled our trade as it is."

"Have we been unfair with you?" Antoine asked, troubled.

"You have been fair. You have been more than fair, you have been kind. I'll come to you again when maman is well. It is for her sake now. She is too ill to work. I must earn for both."

"But the three of us draw larger crowds than would come for one; and it is the size of the crowd that decides the size of the purse."

"I've been thinking it over," said Manders, with a gravity which even Antoine smiled to see, "and I think this, Monsieur Antoine, when I am with you and madame the people think I belong to you and that you take care of me, and they are not so ready with their sous and fifty-centime pieces. But if I sang all alone—"

"They would sympathise with you more?" Antoine interrupted.

"It is not that," Monsieur Antoine, Manders answered, a tinge of something like resentment in his voice; "but if they saw me alone they would know I was working for someone not able to work for herself, and they would be glad to pay me all my songs were worth to them."

Antoine was not so sure of the soundness of the reasoning, but he put his large hand on the boy's shoulder in a way at once forgiving and encouraging as he said,—

"I understand you, my boy. You are a fine little chap, and I see that you are not deserting friends. Go your way. If all goes well with you so much the better. If not, you can always find old Antoine, as long as he keeps out of the Morgue."

So Manders began the life of self-reliance, and hope was ashamed to mock him. He soon learned to go where the crowds were gayest and freest, crossing to

the right bank, making long pilgrimages along the grand boulevards and into the Champs Élysées, returning foot-weary but heart-light to sing his last song below the window where Marie sat waiting his coming—waiting his coming but always fearing that he would not come.

For some months the music lessons had been given in Marie's salon, Miss Warley having ordered in a small upright piano, the explanations concerning which had never been very clear to Marie, though she got the impression that Miss Warley had it at a bargain but could not give it room in her own house, where there was "already one piano too many." When Manders became aware of Marie's illness and feebleness, he wished to stop the music lessons, as he stopped the going to school, in order to devote all the time not claimed by his professional duties to caring for her. But Marie found pleasure in these lessons, over the results of which Miss Warley was so enthusiastic, and Manders went on with them for her sake. They became the daily important features of the morning, and for some reason Miss Warley and Manders seemed to grow happier and happier over them, so that Marie would often come in to be happy with them, sometimes humming through the air as Manders played, and joining with him in one of the little songs he sang to tempt her. And he began to imagine that after all Marie was not so very ill, fixing a great faith on Doctor Besnard's low answer to his low question one day.

"She won't be ill much longer."

His nights were troubled, however, and he wondered how it was that he could never catch her sleeping. He would steal into her room when she had been silent a longer time than usual, but he could not be so noiseless that she would not ask,—

"What is it, dearie?"

One night, though, she waked him with her moaning and talking. He ran to her, affrighted, and knelt beside the bed, whispering,—

"You want me, maman? I am here."

But she was sleeping, her thoughts not taking account of him at all. He waited, not daring to wake her. It was of "Walter" she was dreaming, and she was calling to him, "Shall I never see you again?" and her cheeks were wet to his trembling, light touch. He knelt there until the talking subsided into a murmur and silence came with a sigh. And he knelt there still when the grey light stole in through the curtained window, thinking that his prayers were bringing her this calm and restful sleep.

Manders met Miss Warley at the top of the stairs when she came for the morning lesson.

"Do you know where M. Blakemore is?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Miss Warley, wondering.

"Tell him my maman wants him."

CHAPTER XIX

THE maples were decking themselves in their October finery, setting the mocking birds mad again, when Blakemore found himself once more installed in the grove cottage at Waldmeer. He was making good use of his time in the matter of doing the "effective bits," which seemed to multiply under Florence's direction. Monsieur Monier would hardly have been ashamed of his former pupil in these days, for Blakemore had overcome the obduracies of his brush to an astonishing extent and produced results that seemed to Florence indicative of a very considerable talent. The work in hand now was a dilapidated well-house, long ago abandoned as a water supply, but alive enough for artistic purposes. Florence, in white, was posed on the steps, her back against one of the decaying, lichen-covered posts which supported the tumbling roof, and Réné Papi, an Italian-negro half-bred who insisted on calling himself a French Creole, was in the act of drawing a bucket of water. The forenoon was systematically devoted to work on this exacting subject, which increased the expense by some few dimes, as Réné, notorious throughout the village of indolence for his loyalty to idleness, de-

clared, with innumerable apologetic gestures and cajoling smiles, that his "mos' busy time happen always in the morning as a sure fac', an' 'bliged to charge for the loss of his own work."

Réné was fisherman, boatman, carpenter, driver, gardener, as circumstances dictated when he could allow himself the luxury of doing anything at all. He had got through forty years of life with so little anxiety of mind and such small waste of energy that he seemed no more than thirty-two or three, and was not an unattractive figure, with his long, black hair never combed, his well-managed moustache, half-concealing a sensuous but smiling mouth, his loose cotton shirt, innocent of buttons and rolling open half-way to his belt, showing a brown expanse of vigorous chest, his bare arms testifying to a sufficiency of mysteriously-acquired muscle. Blakemore had first seen him helping to unload an oyster boat at one of the market piers. He went about what he was doing in such a leisurely, indifferent way, and seemed so much readier to talk than to get his barrow from the boat to the oyster stalls, that Blakemore, after watching him some time, spoke to him.

"You are paid by the day, I suppose?" he said inquiringly.

"Oh, no, suh, I only works by job," Réné answered, laughing, and promptly setting down his empty barrow to relieve his arms of strain during conversation.

"You don't seem to be in any hurry to get through."

"Oh! I don' want a git rich all at once. Plenty time for that."

"You expect to be rich, then?"

"Bime-by. Mebbe. Who knows? But not much use being rich. When I has money I has to spend it. Ain't no sense working for what you has to git rid o' right away. Ain't that yo' idee, boss?"

"Can you sit still in one position long?"

"That 'pends what I'm sittin' on." Réné chuckled in appreciation of his own humour.

"Oh! on something comfortable enough."

"That's my stronghold, boss," Réné said with a freer chuckle.

"Well, I want to hire you to sit still for me."

Réné prepared to take up his barrow.

"I see you likes to have yo' fun, suh. You is jes' like me that-a-way. But I mus' be gittin' on. Hope I'll see you some mo'?"

Blakemore explained his object and the bargain was made, Réné stipulating for "fou' bits" as the reward of his sacrifice of serious labour in the profitable hours of the morning, though this was a sum that represented the highest day's earnings in his most industrious periods.

Réné had all the characteristics of a mulatto, but as he spoke the bastard French of the region he felt warranted in classifying himself with the Creoles, and indignantly repudiated his negro moiety, and,

preferring a French to an Italian begetting, avowed that his father was French and his mother Indian, generally adding to the statement the gratuity,—

"An' to judge by the way I feel, my mer' was one them princes."

At any rate, Réné fitted beautifully into the picture of which Florence was the conspicuous figure, and Blakemore began to think that the investment was one happily directed to the making of a picture in which he imagined he was putting a great deal of meaning.

"Ain't yo' been a heap longer this mawnin'?" said Réné, some days after posing had ceased to be a novelty and had grown into a dismaying resemblance to hard work. "My back gittin' tired leaning over this-a-way. Feels like it ready break in two."

"Yes, we'll stop, Réné," Blakemore said, with a smile, but giving the canvas some further touches. "You'd better come here and see how you look, though."

Réné obeyed eagerly. Indeed, he was being kept in service now by an increasing vanity rather than by the pay which he was beginning to think small reward for so much exertion. From the day he could detect the coming likeness to himself in the figure at the well, he had become inflated with self-opinion, and his impatience to see his portrait finished made him dissatisfied with the greater attention Blakemore was giving to that of Florence.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Blakemore asked

when Réné had some time regarded the picture to the amusement of the others.

"I think, suh, that yo' gittin' that chest o' mine too flat, and that's a sure fac'," said Réné in an aggrieved voice, and giving a confirmatory thump to his own firm front. "They ain't 'nother chest like this in Balouis, an' I hates to see it spiled."

Blakemore laughingly reassured him and sent him off to other and more congenial labours, those in which he could "shift" his position once in a while.

"I sympathise with Réné," Florence said. "I always feel after one of these ordeals that I'd like to get on a horse astride and go tearing down the road to find myself. It is the most exasperating, tedious thing I ever did. Nothing could induce me to pose for another picture."

"How do you like the way it is coming on?"

"Very well. But I don't think Réné's objection applies to my case. It is rather the other way, isn't it? I think you will have to subdue that a little. A trifle less fulness, I should say."

"A touch or two will make that right. Though I don't think it so much amiss."

"Of course we have a different point of view," she said; "but if that is true to life, please exercise a modifying license. My actual measure is thirty-two inches. That looks forty."

He painted for a few minutes, she looking on critically, marvelling to see how great a change a simple brush-stroke could make in a general effect.

"How is that?" he finally asked.

"Better. Much better. I breathe freely again. I can eat my luncheon with a clearer conscience. And isn't it luncheon time?"

"I hope so."

"Gather up your traps. I'll carry the stool."

She strolled on to the cottage, leaving him to follow at his convenience. She was sitting on the porch steps, waiting, when Jerry came from the house with some letters in his hand.

"Jes' come fum de pos' office, Miss Flaw'nce, an' I thought yo' might like to have me fetch yo' these here. One is for Mr Blakemore, Miss Leshy say. Which is his'n, Miss Flaw'nce, an' wha' is he?"

"I'll give it to him, Uncle Jerry."

"I 'spec' I kin trus' yo' to do dat, Miss Flaw'nce," said Jerry, with a broad, meaningful grin, as he handed her the letters. "Has yo' got any orders for me, Miss Flaw'nce?'

"No, Uncle Jerry," she answered, looking over the three or four letters.

"'Bleeged to you, Miss Flaw'nce," Jerry said, with a pull at his hat and turning back to the house.

The letter for Blakemore was postmarked Paris, and had been forwarded from his New York address. She laid it on the porch and opened one of her own letters. Blakemore came up before she had finished it.

"Here is a letter for you," she said, holding it out to him.

"Thank you. Um. It's from Miss Warley. You don't mind my looking at it? Queer sort of straight up-and-down woman, didn't you think? Writes to me regularly without having anything to say that is worth while. That is what conscientiousness does for one."

"Do read your letter and let me finish mine! You are a regular chatter-box." She squared around, leaning her elbow on one of the top steps, and proceeded to forget him in the interest of her letter.

Blakemore opened his letter indifferently, and yet, too, with enough curiosity to wish that Miss Warley might be more communicative than usual about someone besides Manders. Her last two letters had said nothing whatever of Marie, which was more disquieting than the one or two vague references to Marie's illness, which Miss Warley had made in her cautious way. In one of these letters, the last one, there was something not very clear about Manders having joined a band of street singers, though Blakemore imagined this was no more than a neighbourhood pastime, one of the boy's strange caprices. He had no idea of the real conditions, not the shadow of a suspicion that anything serious was the matter with Marie. He was therefore shocked and passionately grieved by the unusual letter now in his hand, and which was blurred by unmistakable tear-stains.

"Madame Manders is ill, very ill. I haven't wanted to tell you so long as I could believe that there was any hope. Three days ago, when she seemed brighter

and better than she had been for some weeks, I spoke cheerfully to Doctor Besnard—who has been a noble friend—about her. He shook his head. "Poor child!" he said. "When the leaves begin falling—well, she will be one of them." Still I put off writing. But this morning Manders came to me with a look in his face that made my heart bleed, and he said to me, "Tell Mr Blakemore that my maman wants him." I send you his message. It was in her sleep she called to you. She talked a great deal, Manders said, but he told me nothing. I have never heard her speak of you, but if she talks of you in her dreams she must think of you. Forgive me for beginning to think that she has a reason." A sigh that was like a groan escaped him, and Florence looked up, startled. His face was pale and troubled.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Bad news?"

He handed the letter to her silently. She read it, folded it, and drew the nails of her thumb and finger sharply along the edges, creasing the paper more tightly, again unfolded it and read over again the message from Manders and Miss Warley's comment, then handed the letter back to Blakemore.

"What are you going to do?" she asked in her usual even voice.

"You understand?"

"I understand."

"And—and you are not angry?"

"Angry! why should I be angry? I have known it since the day I saw you with her at St Cloud."

"No," he said, earnestly protesting, "it wasn't so then. You misjudge her—you misunderstand. She has never been—" he hesitated.

She looked up at him with a curious change of expression, a quick transition from indifference to interest. She realised instinctively what was implied by his hesitation and the guilty eagerness of his look.

"It was not a liaison?" she asked.

"No, no! a thousand times no! She was not a woman of that sort. She was not to blame. The blame rests on me alone. I wronged her."

"She—loved you? She believed that you loved her? Well? You abandoned her?"

"No, I was willing to do anything I could. It was she who decided."

"You let her decide?"

"I could not do otherwise."

"And you compromised by agreeing to educate her boy. You are paying your debt that way?"

"She knows nothing of that. She never would have agreed to such a thing."

Florence looked steadily at him for some moments in silence, a barely perceptible smile on her lips.

"I understand it now," she said at length. "I can put a new interpretation on her manner with me the day I called on her. She did not give herself to a chance lover; she was betrayed by an ideal. Well, what are you going to do?"

"What can I do?"

"Must I tell you? Go back to this woman. Pay your debt. There is no debt an honourable man is so much bound to pay as the debt he owes to the woman who has trusted him. Good-bye. I shall not see you again before you go." She held out her hand. "You may take your ring."

"You are turning me off?" he cried, clasping her hand in both of his.

"I am sending you back to the woman who has the right to you. Pay your debt."

"You can't mean that, Florence! You are right to be angry with me, for I have done you a wrong—"

"Don't mistake me," she interrupted, "I am not angry in the least. If your relations with her had been of the common sort—well, I take the world as I find it—I should not have condemned you for that which society encourages, fosters, and secretly applauds in men. But this is quite another matter. You once declared to me that Madame Manders was a good woman. I can believe she was. If she was a good woman she has a claim on you that I recognise. I can only repeat to you, 'Pay your debt.'"

She passed him, walking in the direction of the house. He followed beside her, speaking with pleading intensity.

"Why should you send me away? Why should I do this unheard-of thing? I am in no way bound! I owe no debt! How do I differ from other men that I should be held accountable for a

fault that others commit with impunity? Am I worse or more responsible than they? Am I alone to be sacrificed to a moral scruple—"

She turned towards him, stopping in the path, her eyes flashing the indignation of her impassioned speech.

"I was not thinking of you! I was not thinking of morals! I have nothing to do with them! I said nothing about sacrifice! There is no sacrifice in duty! I care nothing for your usages and your customs, and your contemptible code of worldly honour! I don't care whether you are worse or better than other men! I see you only as a man on whom another woman has a claim that I choose to respect. It is of that other woman I am thinking—selfishly thinking, if you will! I am thinking of myself in her place. If I had given myself to a man in love, and I were dying and my heart called for him, I should feel that he was mine, and that I had a right to summon him from the world's end! If I summoned him, I should expect him to come! And if he were a man worthy of a woman's trust he would come! This woman is calling for you! Your place is by her side! Go to her!"

She thrust the ring which she had taken from her finger into his hand and went hurriedly along the path to the house, hiding in her own room the emotion that could find no relief in tears.

Blakemore, stunned by the force of her unexpected outburst, stood for some minutes where she

left him, staring blankly in the direction in which Florence had gone among the oaks, and then entered the cottage and mechanically set about getting his trunk in order to send by the afternoon train.

He did not hear the luncheon bell, and after a time Jerry came for him.

"Lawd! Mr Blakemore, yo' ain't lost yo' ears, is yo'? I done ring de clapper out de bell tryin' to make yo' hear. Lunch is ready, an' dey's a fine mess o' fresh ketched shrimps to tickle yo' taste comin' in cole fum de ice. Bettah make has'e; Miss Flaw'nce is powahful fond o' shrimps."

"Excuse me to Mrs Storey, Uncle Jerry, and tell her I'm packing up for the afternoon train to New Orleans, as I have got to catch the train for New York to-night."

"Plenty time fer dat an' lunch, too, Mr Blakemore. It's bad luck to travel on a empty stomach."

"I'll get supper in New Orleans. Come for the trunk in an hour, Uncle Jerry. I'll see the ladies then."

"Yo' knows bes', Mr Blakemore; but yo' is missin' a mighty fine mess o' shrimps, I'm tellin' yo' dat fer yo' comfort. Shrimps don' come round evah day to be cotch this time o' year."

Jerry reported to Mrs Storey just as Florence, as composed as usual, came into the dining-room.

"Going to New York!" exclaimed Mrs Storey, looking at Florence somewhat suspiciously. "Isn't he rather sudden about it?"

"Yes," Florence answered quietly, taking her place at the table. "He has just received a letter that makes it necessary for him to start at once for Paris."

"For Paris? Really!" said Mrs Storey, giving her voice a plaintive inflexion. "I was just beginning to find him endurable. Who were your letters from, Florence?"

"One of them was from Cousin Minnie. I haven't opened the others."

"Well, for pity's sake, do! How can you be so lacking in curiosity?"

Florence opened the letter, the writing on the envelope of which piqued her interest, because it was familiar in spite of her inability to identify it. She glanced at the signature, lifted her eyebrows and read the few lines with an enigmatical smile that got no further than the corners of her mouth. The letter was written from the Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York, and was signed "John Mendenhall." She thought it terse enough, yet was conscious of a satisfaction that there was nothing of a propitiatory character about it.

"DEAR MISS STOREY,—I have been in New York for nearly a month, but have only now succeeded in getting your address. New Orleans is one of the American cities I most desire to visit. Balouis, I am told, is almost a suburb of that city. May I have the honour of calling upon your parents and you when I come?—Most sincerely,

"JOHN MENDENHALL."

Florence tossed the letter across the table to her mother after reading it, and, without comment, opened one of the others.

Mrs Storey made no concealment of her pleasure that Mendenhall should have written.

"How opportune!" she exclaimed, without explaining with what she associated the timeliness. "Now I hope you are not going to be silly, Flo! You will invite him down, of course. Don't act as if a foolish love-quarrel could stop the motion of the spheres. Try to discover in yourself an average amount of common sense, and send him a favourable answer. I don't ask you to be urgent, but at least be indulgent. Will you?"

"What would be the object?"

"Object! Why should there be any object? If you have no other reason for doing it, do it to please me. I have no antipathies to Mr Mendenhall."

"Nor have I. I have no feeling toward him one way or another."

"So much the more reason for being civil to him. Will you invite him down?"

"I'll send him permission to call, if you wish it."

"Permission! I do wish you could get a sensible view of life into that eccentric head of yours. Mr Mendenhall is one man picked out of a thousand, to say nothing of his prospects. You have been seeking such a chance for years—"

"I have been seeking, mamma?"

"Well, I have, which amounts to the same thing

and now that the chance has come seeking you, to talk of 'permission' in that irritating way. It is too provoking, Flo!"

Thanks to Mrs Storey's urgency, an indulgently-worded permit was despatched that night; so it was no extraordinary coincidence if, on the day that Blakemore sailed out of New York bay headed for France, Mr John Mendenhall (now in reality Lord Kentmoor, Baron of Kentmoor) was sitting contentedly in the corner of a smoking-room in the limited train speeding toward New Orleans.

CHAPTER XX

THOUGH Mendenhall had, soon after his return to England from Rome, succeeded to the baronage held over-long by his invalid uncle, he imagined that he had particular reasons personal to himself for wishing to keep the fact concealed during at least a part of his American tour. He had the delicacy to think, among other things, that his title would effectually bar the way to a reconciliation with Florence, whose pride he rightly gauged, and he persuaded himself that her friendliness had become an object of increased importance to him. Memories of her seemed to have secreted themselves in every possible hiding-place of his mind for the purpose of rising up unexpectedly to pommel his egoism with regrets; memories of things of which he had taken no notice at the time —her habit of tugging at the top of her glove; of kicking the tip of her elegantly-booted foot beyond her dress skirt at intervals when she sat in animated conversation; of drawing up the right eyebrow when she was on the point of dissenting from something being said; the faintly distinguishable perfume of violets which the air caught from her handkerchiefs; a thousand trifles, which more than beauty of face

or grace of mind charm a man into unconscious bondage to woman, and allure him back from the illusions of freedom. The empty clubs and summer dulness of London made him especially susceptible to these insidious attacks, and after some futile vagabondage in Switzerland he resolved to try the curative expedient of a trans-Atlantic voyage. He booked on a Cunarder as John Mendenhall, and as John Mendenhall he made the acquaintance of Waldmeer.

He was quite prepared for the reception Mrs Storey extended to him, but he was disconcerted by the way in which Florence received him. He thought he knew how as well as anyone to adapt himself to the frigid courtesy of a young lady who has condescended to overlook, without forgetting, a real or fancied indignity, and his plan of procedure with Florence had been so minutely and carefully thought out, that he felt no sort of uneasiness in the anticipation of his meeting with her. But Florence had done some planning on her own account, based on the stupidity of presenting a chill reserve to the man one has invited to come a thousand miles to visit one. She welcomed Mendenhall with such frank cordiality, with so much more friendliness than she had ever before shown him, even coming down the brick walk to meet him at the gate, that he promptly fell into confusion, and babbled such incoherencies as made him wonder what had become of his poise. This

liberal manner said to him as plainly as if Florence had expressed her conditions in words,—

"You are come as a friend of the family, as a free guest in the house; but don't make the mistake of supposing that you will be allowed to exercise any extraordinary privileges. You are warned off."

In accepting the warning, however, Mendenhall had no intention of being ruled by it. Having a distinct recollection of everything said between them in their last conversation, he found much to encourage him now in two things Florence had said about that mischievous ring; first, the remark to the effect that she was just on the point of returning it; second, her defiant declaration, "You have made it a betrothal ring!" Without abating anything of his loyalty to principle, he had reached the conclusion, after arguing with himself all the points suggested by conscience, that Blakemore was really entitled to no more consideration than any other general aspirant to a reward which Florence was still at liberty to bestow where she would. A man very much in love ceases to be able to discriminate impartially between the respective properties of *meum et tuum*, and is very apt to discover a divine virtue in the theory that everything is fair in love and in war. Mendenhall overcame his scruples as to the obligation a man is under to regard his friend's *fiancée* as a preserve upon which there must be no trespassing, by contending that an engagement which has not even been declared to relatives or

intimate friends is no engagement at all, rising hardly above the dignity of a special flirtation, and equally liable to an abrupt and unregarded termination. If there was no engagement, there could be no discredit in cutting in ahead of Blakemore, if it could be done with no greater employment of artifice than time out of mind has been allowed in the rivalries of love. Any lingering doubt he had as to his perfect freedom to act as self-interest dictated was whipped away with the glance which acquainted him of the fact that Florence had put off Blakemore's ring. Perhaps she had not worn it since the day it fell into the fountain! But, be that as it might be, its absence from her finger now permitted him to assume that whatever reason she had had for wearing it before had ceased to exist. The thing to be overcome, then, was not Florence's preference for someone else, but her indifference to him—for indifference only, he thought, could account for the unreserved friendliness of her manner towards him, a manner so opposed to the attitude of mind which invites penitential extravagances and vows of reformation, or which even admits of a recurrence to past misunderstandings.

Mendenhall was of the well-fibred breed of men whose energies increase as difficulties multiply; and though he found this indifference where he had expected to encounter only an obstinate pique, he quickly recovered his fighting courage, and before he was seated with Mrs Storey and Florence under

one of the giant live oaks, had begun to felicitate himself that the situation was precisely the one to quicken most agreeably the spirit of enterprise.

"I am afraid, Mr Mendenhall," Mrs Storey said after the exchange of information touching their respective adventures since the parting in Rome, "I am afraid you will not find it very interesting with us here. You see it is too early for the beginning of the season in New Orleans, and it is late for even the pretence at gaiety we have been making in Balouis. I don't know how we are going to keep you from being bored to death."

"My interest is already keenly excited," Mendenhall answered, glancing at Florence. "You can't imagine what a relief I find it to get well away from cities. Besides, I think the place is full of charm. It is quite a new type to me. I was struck with the view along the drive from the hotel."

"Have you pleasant rooms at the hotel? I'm sorry we can't put you up here. But we haven't room to turn round in in the house; and the cottage—"

"Mr Mendenhall would hardly care to give up his independence, even if we could take him in," Florence suggested.

"No," Mendenhall said laughingly, "I like to be where I can break things when the ancient Briton rises up in me; and heredity is never so rebellious in me as when I am imprisoned in a guest-chamber of a private house."

Florence objected to being made the victim of banter. "You would do well to follow the example of one of our native savages, who, finding himself unfit for civilised restraints, moved over to that island you can see across the bay yonder, where he has everything to himself."

"A hermit? I should like to make his acquaintance. Suppose we sail over some morning?"

"He is rather ill-natured, they say," Mrs Storey objected. "He doesn't approve of visitors."

"So much the more reason for visiting him; he is probably a character," Mendenhall said.

"I should say he shows a want of character. Men who run away from disagreeable situations are not generally overcharged with character, are they?"

Mendenhall was willing to believe that Florence intended this speech to reflect upon his own conduct in a certain emergency; but her smile was much too bland to hide a subtlety, and he perceived how little use there was to make note of the remark for future consideration.

"No," he answered, "they are generally very poor cattle; though I believe there is a good deal of virtue in getting quite alone with Nature now and then, if one has the right sort of stuff in him. It takes some of the egotism out of a man."

"Have you ever tried it?" Mrs Storey asked in entire innocence.

"Yes; but I daresay the course was not thorough," Mendenhall laughed.

"Or the stuff may not have been of the right sort," Florence said, smiling.

"You are laughing at my expense, I see," Mrs Storey said, rising and straightening out the folds of her dress. "I always take that as a signal for retreat. I am going into the house to see if I think it worth while to ask you to stay for dinner. I didn't remember about you when the market people came this morning, and there is no getting anything after eleven o'clock. Florence, do take Mr Mendenhall through the rose garden. I know of nothing better calculated to depress English egotism than a Southern rose garden. The English are so provokingly opinionated about their roses."

Mendenhall did stop to dinner, and made himself better acquainted with Mr Storey, upon whom he had made a call in New Orleans the day before, and by whom he had been taken about the levees and through the French market.

"There are no airs about Mendenhall," Mr Storey had declared approvingly to his wife that night.

And Mendenhall had made a mental memorandum to the effect that Mr Storey was not to be regarded in any sense as an insurmountable obstacle. He had, indeed, found Florence's father an easy-going, amiable man, who did not concern himself with many ideas apart from business, and yet was not so much absorbed in commercial pursuits as to be careless of those genuine courtesies of life, on the observance of which the Southern gentleman prides himself.

When the time came to say good-night, Mr Storey proposed to walk to the hotel with Mendendall, professing to be able to enjoy his cigar better in a stroll, as, in his opinion, a pipe "with enough stem to let you look down into the glowing tobacco" was the true companion of blissful indolence.

"There is a moon, Florence; suppose we go with them?" Mrs Storey proposed. "I think I'd like to stretch myself."

But Florence pleaded the necessity of fortifying herself for the fatigues of a trip to Pass Christian with Mendenhall, to which she had committed herself for the early morning.

"You can go anyhow, if you want to, my dear," Mr Storey said, addressing Mrs Storey in a patronisingly affectionate way.

"No, no," said the lady; "I don't believe much in moonlight trios. Conversation is too difficult. I can content myself with a run up and down the pier."

After the men had gone, Mrs Storey came up to Florence, and putting her arm around her waist, quite as if they were girls together, urged her along, saying,—

"Come, we'll go down to the end of the pier and sit till your father returns, and have a real confidential talk about—a lot of things. You are not any more ready for bed than I am. But I understand; you did not want to appear too precipitate. And perhaps it is just as well. Men are so easily spoiled. Though I don't think you have any occasion

to employ tactics in this case. The advantages are obviously all with you. And I must say I was charmed with you to-day, and really I am grateful to you for your exercise of good sense, Flo, grateful and delighted, dear."

"Whatever in the world are you talking about, mamma?" Florence interrupted, laughing. "What has happened to you? You can't say it is the moon, for it isn't strong enough, and the wine was ever so long ago."

Mrs Storey withdrew her arm from her daughter's waist. "That is one of your malignant laughs! Then you are not going to take me into your confidence?"

"About what?"

"About what? As if there was any question about what! You don't mean to pretend that the affair stands between you and Mr Mendenhall as it did before I left you alone with him?"

"Precisely. And it will stand just there, if you will ask about it, when Mr Mendenhall's visit has come to an end."

"I don't believe you. You have a vicious spirit of torment in you, and you delight in vexing me. Instead of a sisterly candour with me, you have an impish impudence, and I cannot even have the authority of a mother respected. Authority, indeed! A precious lot of authority parents have over children nowadays! And as for mothers, I can see no use for them after they have performed the functions of

maternity! Advisers! counsellors! guides! friends! Humph! those words are no longer even figures of speech in the filial vocabulary as applied to mothers; and the time probably is not far distant—"

"You are wasting energy, mamma," interrupted Florence, in her turn putting an arm about Mrs Storey, at the same time giving a little steadying shake with her thumb and finger to Mrs Storey's unduly elevated chin. "You are quite on the wrong tack. If you thought you detected in me to-day a sign of happy satisfaction, it was not because I had come to an understanding with Mr Mendenhall, but because I am getting to an understanding with myself. I am working out a little problem of personal arithmetic, and I'll tell you all about it when I get the answer. For the present I can only say that it is *not* a sum in church addition, by which one plus one equals one. Now, let's talk about something else."

"Blakemore, for example." Mrs Storey exploded the name in much the same way that one puffs out an obstinate candle.

"Not of men at all, but of missions."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs Storey, "men are women's only missions, no matter what names you use to designate them. You have woman's this associations, woman's that societies, and woman's clubs coming up, religious, social and political; but at one end of them all is the kitchen, and at the other end is the drawing-room, and man is on a pedestal mid-way between the two. I get very tired hearing about woman's

mission, and finding that it always resolves itself into a struggle to annihilate everything that is not of the masculine gender. You will find that a female reformer is generally the result of Nature's indecision whether to make a man or a woman, and compromising in a neuter, mentally speaking, of course."

"You have given me the key to the riddle, mamma, and helped me tremendously. The way is clear before me. I know my strength henceforth. I am one of those mental neuters."

"Well, don't try to rob me of actual grand-children, if you do make an imbecile of yourself in other directions. And if you were as wise as you pretend to be, you would let me pick out the father. I find it chilly out here without a wrap."

"Shall I get you one?"

"No; you are not interesting enough to make it worth while. I'm going in."

"What do you think Mendenhall asked me to-night?" Mr Storey asked of Mrs Storey when they were alone.

"I suppose he asked you if he could have Florence," Mrs Storey replied complacently.

"You have marvellous intuitions, Leshy! He did."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I told him, of course, that that was a question with which I had nothing whatever to do, and I referred him to Florence."

"Well?"

"Then he wanted to know if I gave him leave to

pay his addresses to Florence. I'm glad it was dark enough to hide a grin, Leshy, for I'm sure one spread itself all over my face. But I gave him leave just the same! Imagine one of our boys asking leave to court a girl! Much they or the girls either care what the old man thinks, eh, Leshy? But I rather like Mendenhall. He is clean-cut and straightforward. He is about as nice as Walter, I should reckon, though they're not much alike; but Walter has one enormous advantage in my eyes, he lives on the right side of the ocean. I must send word to Walter that there is a rival in the field."

"You must do nothing of the sort."

"Not warn him that I have given another man permission—"

"Certainly not! Don't meddle in what doesn't concern you. They are all quite capable of taking care of themselves. Besides, everything will be settled before you could get word to Blakemore if you should be ninny enough to write."

"You think so?" Mr Storey asked, a troubled look coming into his face.

"Why, yes. I think this excursion to Pass Christian in the morning quite favourable to a definite settlement."

Mr Storey gave a rather deep-drawn sigh and stroked his bald spot reflectively.

"It seems so plaguey treacherous. But I suppose it is all right. Women seem to have rules of their own for the management of this sort of

affair. If they were both here, though, I'd bet on Walter."

"And, if I know orange blossoms when I see them, you would lose."

"Maybe," Mr Storey said musingly, and fondling the top of his head anew. "I remember my father saying to me one time when we were at the races in Mobile, 'If you ever have anything to do with race-courses, Henry, make it a rule never to bet on fillies; they are not to be depended on.'"

"I must confess that I don't see the application of that remark to our present subject of conversation."

"There isn't any, my dear; none whatever. I was only thinking that there is a right smart resemblance between girls and fillies. Don't you think so?"

"I think you are odious. Good-night," and Mrs Storey turned the angle of her cheek to receive the tributory kiss which she nightly exacted of Mr Storey as an evidence of continued conjugal submission.

CHAPTER XXI

If the day at Pass Christian offered favourable opportunities, Mendenhall was not injudicious enough to take advantage of them. His object seemed to be to persuade Florence of the entire disinterestedness of his motives in consenting to appropriate to himself so large a share of her time and society. He exerted himself to be agreeable without overstepping the bounds of reserve she defined for him, and was so careful to avoid anything like a reference to past incidents of a personal nature that Florence began to doubt, as the day wore along, if she had any good reason for the guards she had posted at every avenue of conversational approach. Such is the perversity of human nature, the more steadily Mendenhall bore away from the one subject she had determined should not be discussed between them, the more desirous Florence became that he should venture toward it. She even felt a sense of defeat and humiliation that evening when Mrs Storey, her eyes eager and her smile expectant, came to her with a meaningful "Well?" to which she had to respond with cheery mendacity, "I haven't an idea what you mean."

"I mean is it settled?"

"Don't be a goose, mamma. I have told you there is nothing to settle."

There were many occasions in the next half-dozen days perfectly adapted to emotional lapses, of which Mendenhall showed an irritating unconsciousness. There were aimless driftings through the pine woods, over the deep carpet of fallen needles; drives along the shadowy palm-dressed road that led to the old mill on the river, a spot Arcadian in its invitations to romance; idlings in a boat anchored over the channel, where Florence, under a sunshade, read aloud as Mendenhall patiently fished, with no more sportsmanlike reward than the hooking of catfish not gamey enough to struggle against captivity, or lashing "stingerees" that were dangerous to get off the line; strolls at sundown along the beach, grass-grown to the water's edge; opportunities so neglected by Mendenhall that Florence came to have an irritable resentment of that perpetual mark of interrogation in Mrs Storey's eyes. Resolved as she was what to say should Mendenhall presume to get sentimental, she was becoming impatient for the chance to say it, and there were times when she was almost irresistibly impelled to begin the attack herself.

"His complacency is coming to be positively insulting," she thought. "I shall die of chagrin if he doesn't get out of it."

And it happened that Mendenhall chose what

might be thought the least suitable, the least propitious of all possible times, were it not that love has no eyes for the incongruous and no sense of untimeliness.

It was the outcome of an interrupted sail.

Réné, whose repinings over the wanton abandonment of work on his picture Florence had soothed by various friendly employments, had rigged his cumbersome fishing-boat into quite a respectable sailing craft for their benefit, and with its aid Florence and Mendenhall had made explorations of remote points of the bay. Mendenhall was an excellent sailor, and finding the boat a good and tractable traveller, had proposed one morning that they provision themselves for the day and put out into the Gulf and "shake off the land for a while." Mrs Storey had accepted Mendenhall's invitation to go with them, and entered into the enterprise with such vivacity of spirit that even Florence was surprised when, at the last moment, Mrs Storey suddenly and dramatically declared,—

"There! it is the most provoking thing in the world, but do you know, Flo, I forgot all about having promised that wretched father of yours to meet him in New Orleans this afternoon! I've got to sign something or other, heaven knows what! I can't go with you, but don't give up your sail. Go and have a good time. It is a splendid day for it. I envy you! I was pining for a lungful of open sea air. Take care not to get drowned, Mr Mendenhall.

I daresay it would be highly poetic, but don't do it. You know we have a bezique party for to-morrow night."

They put out under a fine breeze blown fragrant from the pine woods and made straight for the open sea, concerning themselves not at all with that patch of umber which spotted the eastern horizon as the cloud which Gehazi discovered after repeated clamberings to the mountain top.

Storms, like other forces in the South, gather with leisurely deliberation and generally with apparent irresolution, the clouds shifting and clearing, and remassing and dispersing, in such a purposeless fashion, that often befooled humanity gets into the way of despising the signs of the heavens and goes its way reckless of consequences. Florence, better acquainted than Mendenhall with the caprices of her native skies, saw nothing to excite her anxiety in the aspect that Mendenhall thought ominous, when, considerably after noon, they found themselves in the open waters, land indistinguishable, and giant spectres of white, and yellow, and purple, and black, making a majestic array against the sun. Far away, too, the white-caps were beginning to sport.

"What if we do get caught?" Florence cried with enthusiasm. "I could get under the tarpaulin, and you are not made of sugar or salt! These storms never amount to anything at this time of year. You would only have to keep the boat before the wind. It would be grand sport. The only fear

is that these clouds are making fun of us and don't intend to make things lively at all."

"Well, if we don't have a 'good one,' you have got a special system of meteorology in this country," said Mendenhall. "My opinion is that we ought to make for shore with all speed."

"Are you afraid?" Florence laughed.

"Yes, I'm afraid. I am always afraid of a tub like this when there is a woman on board with that sort of thing coming up."

"I thought Englishmen were afraid of nothing."

"So they are; very much afraid of it."

"You think I would cut up badly—have hysterics, and all that sort of thing."

"I think you would act like a woman."

"Try me."

"I have a mind to," Mendenhall said, smiling, and letting the sail belly out a little more to the stiffening breeze.

He kept the boat head-on for the white-caps that were beginning to break a few boat-lengths beyond them, and as the little craft careened as if to take in sea, Florence splashed her hand into the water with the delight of a child, and laughed with unrestrained pleasure when the boat dashed into the rising billows and sent the salt spray flying over them.

But a reinforcement of clouds had come up from the west and south-west, shutting out the sun, and Mendenhall presently realised that there was no time for larking. The shore was a long way off, and the

storm, having done with trifling, was preparing to be very much in earnest. He gradually veered the boat round, until, before Florence was aware of any change of direction, they were bowling along before a steadily-increasing blow, that threatened to make it necessary to take in the sail if they were to escape foundering among waves that were becoming turbulent under conflicting winds.

"Wasn't it worth while?" Florence cried out jubilantly, just at the moment when Mendenhall thought the sail was getting away from him and was making prodigious efforts to recover control.

"Decidedly worth while," he answered, giving the stay-rope an extra hitch around the pin. "But you must be jolly well wet."

"It is not worth mentioning. Salt water never hurts one. It's a tonic."

"Are you chilly?"

"No; it is delicious. Do you mind?"

"I am just beginning to enjoy it."

The rain held off considerately until Mendenhall saw land a short run ahead, when there came a scattering discharge of big drops.

"We are getting to shore. We may find shelter before the rain falls. We must have made a lively run of it. I didn't think we were so near."

Florence looked over her shoulder and took their bearings.

"That isn't the shore," she said, laughing. "That is the hermit's island. We won't find any shelter

there, I can tell you. The shore is a mile and a half beyond that."

"We'll run in there until the storm passes any way," said Mendenhall, heading for a break in the tree line that seemed to offer a landing point.

The bow of the boat ground into the sand and gravel and came to a stop with a lurch several feet from the shore line. Mendenhall leaped into the water and made the painter fast to the trunk of a sapling, and then waded back for the tarpaulin, which he took up, saying to Florence,—

"Wait a minute; I'll have to carry you."

He carried the tarpaulin to the foot of a huge elm, whose wide-spreading and compact branches promised shelter, and hurried back for Florence, as the rain was falling heavily now.

"Don't come for me," she cried, standing up in the rocking boat with her skirts grasped in both hands. "It isn't deep. I've nothing to spoil. And I should like wading. Do look the other way."

But he came stubbornly on.

"I am going to carry you," he said, and as he took her in his arms, lifting her to his shoulders, she wondered why she had never noticed that he was a man built for uncommon strength. She felt very like a child in his assured grasp. He did not put her down until they were under the tree.

"There!" he said with satisfaction. "Sit down; the ground is dry yet; and I'll fix this tarpaulin over you. Now," he said, when he had arranged a tent-

like protection for her, "if it rains cats and dogs you won't suffer."

"There is plenty of room for you," she said. "Aren't you going to come under?"

"Rather," he said, taking a seat beside her. "Do you mind my smoking?" feeling in his waistcoat pocket for a cigar.

"No; if you have a cigarette I'll join you."

"I didn't know you smoked!"

"I don't; but I can—and this is one of the occasions when I'd like to."

He offered her his case, and, lighting a match, held it to her.

"Light your cigar first; I'll take a light from that; it is more sociable."

"If we had those things out of the locker now," he said presently, "we might have a picnic. Shall I get them?"

"Wait till the rain stops. I suppose you haven't a dry thread on you as it is. You must be cold."

"Not in the least. This isn't my first wetting. And, as you say, one can stand a lot of salt water."

"I suppose this sort of thing would scandalise all the women of your London set if they knew about it."

"I don't know. Why?"

"You English are so tediously conventional and so stupidly proper! Your bible is a book of etiquette—which, by the way, is like your constitution, unwritten—and you have compressed the ten command-

ments into two, 'Thou shalt not be natural;' and 'Thou shalt have no other God but Form.'"

"But we are beginning to make allowances for Americans," he said, smiling impudently, as he looked at her through his cigar smoke.

"You mean we are beginning to educate you."

Mendenhall laughed.

"No doubt that is the Yankee way of looking at it. Children are always sending their grandparents to school."

A crash of thunder, followed by a torrential downpour, to which the elm offered no resistance, made them huddle together and draw the folds of the tarpaulin closer about them. They could hear through the roar of the storm the beat of heavy breakers, and knew that the tempest had reached the height of its violence, and must soon subside. Within twenty minutes the rain had stopped, though the drops from the leaves were still falling on their canvas roof in lively tattoo. The wind had spent its force, too, and the waves were tossing only with the energy of their own momentum. Mendenhall pushed aside one end of the tarpaulin, and got upon his feet.

"I'll look after the boat. A little of that wine and a biscuit or two will do us no harm just now, I think. Hello!" he exclaimed a moment later, "where *is* the boat? It's gone!"

Through the breaking clouds the sun shone brightly on the bay, illuminating it to the horizon. Several

hundred yards away, the boat was drifting with the waves and tide, flapping its loose sail in the breeze, as if waving them a mocking good-bye.

Florence came to his side and looked as he pointed.

"There it goes!" he said dismally.

"What a joke on you!" she laughed. "That shows how securely you can tie up a boat."

"I tied it securely enough, you see," pointing to a coil of the painter about the sapling. "The confounded rope was rotten. What are we to do? How are we going to get across the bay?"

"How woebegone you look! One would think you had a mind to cry about it! I think it is a jolly lark! It is like being shipwrecked on a desert island. We can pretend we are the Swiss Family Robinson. What are you so solemn about?"

"You don't seem to see that there is a solemn side to this," he said earnestly. "In the first place, as the tide is coming in, the boat will drift to shore soon or late, and they'll think that we have been drowned."

"Well, that won't drown us, will it?"

"But what about your mother and your father?"

"How painfully serious you are? As the storm has ceased, the boat will drift in right side up, so that the stupidest fisher-boy will know we haven't been capsized. They will naturally conclude that we were out of the boat when it got away from us. A little common sense will teach them that we are safe on dry land, and they will probably think of looking for us in the right place."

"But the boat may go miles out of way, and not be picked up before morning!"

"So much the merrier," said Florence.

Mendenhall looked gravely into her face as he said slowly,—

"Would you mind being left on the island alone for a few hours?"

"Afraid? No; what should I be afraid of?"

"Well, I am going to swim across."

"Swim across! Why it is a mile and a half! You would drown before you got half-way."

"That would be better than for me to stop here all night."

"Don't be silly," said Florence, taking his meaning, and changing her manner. "You haven't any need to do the heroic, though I compliment your readiness. All we have to do is to walk to the other end of the island and borrow a boat from the hermit—or buy it if he won't lend it."

Mendenhall thrust his hands into his jacket pockets and laughed, rather a foolish laugh, like that of a boy whose shrewdness has been tricked by his schoolfellows.

"I had forgotten the hermit," he said. "You were laughing at me. Isn't it strange how easily a man can make an ass of himself? I'm rather given to that sort of thing; it has got to be a second habit with me. Well, I'll go and hunt the hermit. There is no good of your going. You stop here. You might as well keep your feet dry. I'll pull the boat round here for you."

There are conditions precedent to pulling a boat as there are to cooking a hare, as Mendenhall admitted when he found no hermit in the house and no boat in the slip provided for it. Half submerged in the sand and water was the rotting shell of a skiff, which yielded itself in pieces as Mendenhall tugged at it, but this was the only thing in the way of water-craft that rewarded his search.

"We are monarchs of all we survey," he declaimed as he rejoined Florence, "and our right there is none to dispute, for the hermit has gone and taken his boat with him."

"He couldn't very well go without it. I suppose there is nothing for us but to wait his return. Is his house open?"

"Yes; but I don't think you would care to go inside."

"Probably not, but we could fetch out a chair or something to sit on that is dry. It is clearing off beautifully. Come along; we sha'n't find it so difficult to endure our captivity."

As they pushed along through the wet underbrush and the tangles of rank grass, Mendenhall, while talking animatedly enough with Florence, was taking counsel of himself in widely different directions of thought. What surprised him was that this inner talk should take the character of a debate in which pros and cons were argued with calm force on the one side, and a reckless fervidity on the other. The surprise was due to the fact

that he seemed to be making the acquaintance of a new personality come up from the domain of his sub-conscious self. He looked upon it with the curiosity that he would have given to the casual inspection of any material *lusus naturæ* for the first time brought before his eyes. But as the sun sank below the forest horizon, with no sign of the homing hermit, Mendenhall awoke to the consciousness that the arguments were becoming more and more confused, and the new personality more and more distinct and interesting.

"Suppose the hermit shouldn't come back to-night?" he asked suddenly.

"That hadn't occurred to me," Florence replied, a tinge of anxiety for the time troubling her fancy. "That would be dreadful! And do you know it is not at all improbable, for I've heard that he sometimes works all night in the oyster beds!"

"If he hasn't come by moonrise I shall make for the shore," said Mendenhall, with as much emphasis as if he were combating opposition. The prospect alarmed her.

"You couldn't do that. The distance is too great."

"Not at all. I can do it easily enough."

"But there is really no necessity for you to take the risk. If worst come to the worst, we could wait here until morning."

The new personality concurred in the opinion. But Mendenhall answered,—

"Yes, if we had only ourselves and your parents

to deal with. Unfortunately, there is a community of gossips to consider."

"Well, what could they say?"

"What could they not say? They would have the right to say what they pleased. And there would be only one way to stop their tongues."

"Yes?"

"You would have to marry me. Agree to become my wife, and—"

He had reached out his arms to take her, but she sprang aside with such a merry burst of laughter that he felt a momentary anger. He was not in a frame of mind to be mocked.

"And do you think," she asked, enjoying his vexation, "that I would agree to marry a man to save appearances? Give myself away because, otherwise, a lot of people, for whom I don't care a snap of my fingers, might clack their scandalous tongues? No, I thank you! You needn't fall into any notions of knight-errantry on my account, my dear Mr Mendenhall. As long as I know myself worthy of peoples' respect it doesn't make a particle of difference to me into what errors of judgment they may tumble. I care very little what people think. It isn't worth while."

"If you think that way, there is all the more reason why I should take care to protect you against your own indifference."

"You have been reading Don Quixote without understanding it," she said, smiling at him.

Mendenhall said no more on the subject, but when the moon had pencilled off his course shoreward across the now gently undulating waters of the bay, he threw off his coat and waistcoat and began unlacing his boots.

"Are you really going to do it?" she asked.

"Of course I am," he answered.

"Luckily I am not heavily dressed," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"I am going with you."

The idea was refreshingly comical to him. It put him in high humour. His spleen went out in a guffaw.

"So you are mermaid, then, among other things! Perhaps you are Undine herself! That explains your oddity! A mile and a half of water is a mere promenade to you. Or do you count on riding a dolphin? They say they are slippery, sharp-spined beasts—how do you find them?"

"I am quite at home in the water, and I shouldn't be surprised if I could swim as well and as far as you can. But I don't intend to swim, and I haven't got a dolphin; but if you go I am going with you—we are going to end our adventure together."

"How are you to manage it? Is your parasol a fairy wand?" Mendenhall was pleased with the tone of sarcasm he got into the speech.

Florence was complacently matter-of-fact.

"There is a square piece of timber by the side of the house. It is big enough to support us in the water as we swim, or to rest us when we are tired.

You are to do up the things we don't wear in your coat, and tie the bundle on to the log. If necessary, the log would hold me too."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Mendenhall, finding her serious. "The thing is not to be thought of."

"It has been thought of, and that is what we shall do—unless we stay on the island."

Mendenhall protested, reasoned and ridiculed in vain; and from having regarded the scheme as an alternative, Florence came to urge it as a positive necessity, with the final result that Mendenhall got the timber down into the water while she was getting herself in readiness for the exploit.

When everything was in readiness and Florence was on the point of wading into the shallows, Mendenhall caught her by the hand.

"Stop! It is a foolish and dangerous undertaking. You were right in the first place. We'll wait here until morning."

"I like danger, and I like folly," Florence answered. "I'm in the vein, and I'm going. You can come or stay as you please." She broke from him, plunging into the water and giving the log a shove as she did so.

Mendenhall followed. He admired her pluck. Men who are themselves brave admire courageous women, and he wished, now that they were really launched into the adventure, that the sea were a little rougher, the element of danger a little greater; he thought he should like to see her battle.

"Are you cold?" he asked, after they had been swimming some time.

"It was chilly at first; but I'm warm now."

"It will take us about an hour. Are you good for it?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. It's jolly."

"You swim well."

"It is my chief accomplishment."

"One of them. You have many chief accomplishments."

"Most of them tabooed."

"Not by the elect. Shall we rest?"

"If you are tired." She climbed half-way on to the log, and he swam to the opposite side, holding on by his left arm.

"Florence."

"Yes?"

"You know that I love you."

"Shall we swim on?"

She slipped back into the water. He had thought her singularly beautiful as she sat in the clear moonlight, the wet garments that clung about her glistening with the movements of her body, and her action disappointed him.

"Won't you listen to me? You are not indifferent to me, are you?"

"I think so."

"I won't believe it! You once cared for me."

"I was beginning to. But that is past. We needn't talk of it."

"We must talk of it. If you ever cared for me you care for me now. I love you, and I want your love in return."

"You had your chance and you threw it away. If you had fought it out with me that time in Rome, perhaps I might have given in to you. But you ran away."

"You sent me away!"

"The man I should think it worth while to marry could not be sent away."

"But I have come back!"

"Too late. You did not think me worth the winning at the right time. That is the one thing a woman can't forgive."

He swam around to come beside her.

"You shall not send me away again. You shall be mine in spite of yourself. I love you. I love you. No one else shall have you."

He grasped the log and put his free arm about her.

"Let me go!"

"Promise to be my wife!"

"Let me go!"

"Not until you have promised me!"

She released her hold on the log and thrust against it, struggling to free herself from him. But he held her firmly.

"You are mad," she cried.

"Yes, with love for you. I care for nothing but you. You are my world, my life! If I lost you

once, I shall not lose you again. You have laughed at me, despised me! You shall not laugh at or despise me again! You are mine! I mean to have you!"

"Do you think this is the way to make me love you?" renewing her vain struggle to free herself. "You are a brute! a coward!"

"Yes, both, since I am strong enough to hold you, and since I am afraid to live without you."

"What do you mean?" looking for the first time into his face, and startled by what she saw there.

"You know what I mean," he answered.

She looked at him fixedly, ceasing to struggle against him.

"You would do that?" she asked, a curious eagerness in her voice.

"I would do that," he said determinedly.

"You think you can frighten me!"

"I do not wish to frighten you. If we go ashore it shall be as affianced lovers."

She laughed.

"And you would trust a promise got in that way?"

"I can trust you."

"And you would take an enforced wife?"

"You love me."

"I shall not give you the promise."

"No?"

"No."

He let go his hold on the log, clasping her tightly in his arms and pressing his lips to hers passionately

as they sank into the water. But Florence did not struggle. Instead, she clasped her arms about his neck responsively, it seemed to him, and fearlessly, her lips still held against his own. He was uncertain of this for a moment, and the waters above his head seemed to beat his thoughts into disorder, but understanding came to him with a rush of overwhelming emotion and he released his clasp from her, making a joyous sweep of his arms, forcing his way upward unmindful of the burden clinging so closely to his neck.

He swam for the log, drawing her with him, and clutched at it, holding to its edge, while with the other arm he lifted her so that her head came clear of the water. She drew a deep breath and looked up into his face with a smile.

"You are a strange wooer," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

MANDERS was unwilling to leave Marie this morning. Something seemed to keep him, as he confessed to her when she warned him playfully that he was wasting time.

"Every time I start for the door it is the same as if someone said, 'Wait a while, Manders,' and I can't go out. You are sure you are feeling all right?"

"You foolish boy! don't you see how well I am? Don't you see how much better I am? Doctor Besnard is a wonderful man, almost as wonderful a man as you are, dearie; and between you I am getting ever so well."

Manders had learned the trick of smiling with the lips without taking counsel of his heart, and he looked brightly into Marie's face; but something wrenched more fiercely than usual within his breast, and the lips paled as they smiled. The remarkable clearness and transparency of her face and throat made him think of those exquisite lilies of the Easter, which are so delicate your thumb and finger pressed upon a petal bruise it to perishing. And in her cheeks he saw the thumb and finger pinch of an

invisible cruel hand, and it seemed to him so much more vividly distinct this morning.

Marie, bending over her work, had only noted the smile, and she drew comfort from it, for she had come to regard every firm, cheery word of the doctor's and every sunny look of Manders as evidence that her improvement was not a delusion of her own imagination merely. To strengthen her self-confidence Doctor Besnard encouraged her industry with the needle, and Miss Warley had given her hints in embroidery, so that Marie had come to think herself rather an artistic as well as expert needlewoman. Pride in what had become really high-class work gave her the energy to its accomplishment, and the good doctor declared more than once to Miss Warley,—

"It beats all my experience; but the work she is doing is her medicine. I suppose it is because it keeps her mind active in a useful employment. I must experiment along that line. Keep her busy; there is no danger of her overdoing."

So Marie had the habit of early rising to begin her work in the freshness of the warm sunshine, and though she rested many, many times in the course of the day, it surprised them all what quantities of sewing she managed to do in a week's time.

It was not altogether in jest, then, that she said to Manders this morning,—

"Now, you must not stand around to make me talk to you, for that hinders my work. Away with

you. And, Manders, I sha'n't scold if you bring me an orange when you come."

But when he had gone down into the street he lingered about the doorway, undecided and reluctant. He went as far as the corner and returned, thinking he would better go up to Marie again, but could find no excuse. Then he remembered what she had said about an orange. He would take one up to her now. He ran to the *épicerie* two turnings along the street. The grocer's wife was in charge.

"How much for your best oranges, madame?"

"Four sous each, *mon joli garçon*. How many will you have?"

"One—six. But I shall pay you for them this evening; I have not made my money yet."

"Ha! ha! one would say you had dealings at the Bourse! Eh! well; there are your oranges, and if you sing in front of my door this evening, I shall not mind the odd four sous."

"Thank you, madame; but I never get less than ten sous for a song," said Manders, taking his bag of oranges, and throwing her a pleasantly impudent glance.

"Ha! ha! the little droll! You might own Paris at that rate one of these days."

As Manders approached his number, he saw a cab stop before the entrance and a man get out. The figure was too familiar to him to permit of an instant's doubt or mistake, and Manders stopped still as he recognised Blakemore.

His face paled and flushed by turns, and his heart beat violently as he recalled the words Marie had babbled and moaned in her sleep as he knelt by her bedside. One thing she had said which pierced him through, and for that he hated this man for whom his mother had called so piteously.

Blakemore had paid his fare and entered the house before Manders could get possession of himself. Blakemore was going rapidly up the third flight when Manders overtook him.

"Wait!" Manders called in a low voice.

"Is it you, Manders?" Blakemore asked, stopping and looking into the semi-darkness behind him.

"Yes. You must let me go first. You mustn't come until I tell you."

He spoke authoritatively, going by without greeting Blakemore and running swiftly up the stairs to the door, where he stopped, panting for breath, but entered the room before Blakemore could come up to him, singing as he entered, as he always did on coming home to Marie.

"Why have you come back so soon?" Marie asked chidingly yet gratefully, too, he was so precious to her eyes.

"I bring you oranges!"

"So many! I only dreamed of one. This is wicked extravagance. You must take the others back."

"On the contrary, you must eat them all. They are magic oranges. They are not two-sou affairs

such as Mère Pugens brings to you once in a while. Look at that one, now! Do you know what will happen when you eat it, if you put the seeds in a circle and make a wish for something—no, that isn't right—oh, yes, you must make a wish to see someone—that is it—and if there are as many seeds as there are letters in the name, you will see the person that very day. Miss Warley told me all about it."

"How wonderful!" said Marie, smiling.

"You mustn't laugh; it's true. Let's try it now. It won't take two minutes. And who will you think of? Who would you like to see? Captain Warley? He hasn't been here in a long time. But, then, he is too old to be interesting, isn't he? So is M. Monier. You used to have a lot of friends you don't see any more. Isn't there one of them you can think of?"

Marie was amused by the way he rattled on, with an air of mock gravity and taking the seeds from her, as if each one were big with destiny.

"You are to find out from the orange seeds who it is I'm going to see."

There was one seed more than he wanted, and he rid himself of it secretly, arranging and rearranging the others in a perplexed way, trying a variety of names, finally, as if by an inspiration, crying out with the energy of triumph,—

"Blakemore! That name fits! You are going

to see Monsieur Blakemore! What an odd thing that would be! He'll have to cross the ocean."

He professed to think he was having rare fun at his game, pretending not to see the convulsive way in which Marie's hand was pressed against her side, or the sudden flush that came into her face; and he went on with his chatter until he saw her composure returning. Then suddenly looking up at her, his face smiling, he exclaimed,—

"If you really want to see him, you shall! Shall I get him? You don't believe I can? You'll see!" and before she realised what was passing, Blakemore had entered the room.

He had advanced to within a few steps of her before he saw her clearly, and he stopped short as if a powerful blow had been struck in his face. This woman, rising so unsteadily to her feet, with half-outstretched arms, a mysterious smile of tremulous hope on the thin lips and shining through the transparent face, this was not Marie?

In the same instant a realisation of the other's thoughts came to each of them. The smile and the joy vanished from Marie's face, a shiver seemed to pass over her, her arms drooped down to her sides, and she would have fallen, but that Blakemore, a pitiful tenderness swelling in his breast, sprang forward with his arms outheld to receive her.

Manders stole out into the hall, closing the door behind him, and crouched down in the angle of the staircase where it was darkest, his face between his

knees and his hands clasped at the back of his head. He was holding himself down in a struggle. Jacob wrestled through the night no more desperately against the force that opposed him than Manders wrestled with his temptation in the dark corner of the stairs. The agony of loss and desolation had pierced him in the tone of Marie's voice when she cried out at the sight of Blakemore. The cry came back to him, articulate, intelligible, addressing itself directly to him. "I don't need you any more, Manders!" it was saying to him. "I don't need your love, your care, your protection any more. My heart has come back to me! I can get well now!" His soul was bruised with the sound of it, and his thoughts were bitter with the bitterness of jealousy and death, not good fruits of the infant mind. This jealousy was more than the passion of supplanted love; it was the anguish of superseded devotion. The very essence and life of his happiness was the fact that he was Marie's champion, defender, provider, that she had become dependent upon him, and that he was equal to the obligation. The idol of his love was the helpless object of his care, and the rapture of his song was the pride of his faith. If he were no longer needed for this service, if she no longer looked to him as her prop and stay, what need for him at all? She had needed him until Blakemore came; she would need him again if Blakemore— Why had he come? What right had he to come? Why should he be

here now? A dull memory of his own words to Miss Warley came as an answer to him. "Tell him my maman wants him." Yes; Blakemore had not come unbidden. That much was clear. But there was no reason for his staying. "He must not stay! He sha'n't stay!" And the cry seemed to say to him anew, "My heart has come back to me! I can get well now!" Over and over the words repeated themselves, "I can get well now; I can get well now!" until Manders began to use them as a weapon for his own defence, beating down with them the spirit of violence striving to master him. The victory came at last, came with a flood of tears and a convulsion of sobs that seemed to rack his very being, but which, subsiding, permitted him to see his angel of Peniel.

Presently there was the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs. It was Doctor Besnard coming for his regular semi-weekly visit. Manders dried his eyes, but drew closer into the angle, holding his breath as the doctor passed. Though he had mastered himself, he was unwilling that any friendly eye should see the signs of the struggle. He watched the doctor enter as Blakemore held open the door, and it puzzled him that Doctor Besnard seemed in nowise surprised to be greeted by this stranger. It did not come within the range of his knowledge that an experienced physician allows nothing to surprise him, and therefore he concluded that Doctor Besnard knew all about Blakemore, and was pre-

pared for his appearance. When the door closed he felt shut out. For the first time in his life he caught a sympathetic sense of what it means to be alone in the world. He had thought of others being alone, and had been sorry for them, looking especially with a curious pity upon the school procession of coarsely-uniformed children who were named orphans; but he had never had the thing brought home to him along the way of kindred emotions until now, and it terrified him. He thought he must run to beat at the door, calling out that he was there; but he remembered that there was no need of that—the door would open to his touch, and there were kisses and love and friendliness beyond it ready for his taking. No; there was no need of anything from him but to go down the stairs and into the streets to the beginning of his labours. There was still the need of being, of holding life in a firm grip, fearlessly. If Marie no longer required his services, he still had duties to perform, and chief of these was to do the best that was in him to do. He had need of himself!

As he walked along, going in the direction of the river, his thoughts buffeted helpless to and fro between mysteries he was just beginning to discern, it occurred to him to tell Mère Pugens of Blakemore's arrival. He did not choose that she should find it out for herself; he did not choose to have her think that Marie had anything to do with the coming. His reasons were not well-defined, but he was sure of his

conclusions, and he went at once to the shop. Happily Mère Pugens was occupied with a patron for whom she was weighing out some tobacco. He took advantage of the situation to call to her from the door,—

"Monsieur Blakemore has come! I sent for him! Maman didn't know!"

He was off before Mère Pugens had fully grasped what he was saying. Having told this woman because he thought in that way to shield Marie from the effects of surprise in the garrulous and too inquisitive dame, Manders felt that it would be a sort of treason not to tell Miss Warley. He recollected, too, that to-morrow was lesson day, and Miss Warley would come expecting him to play and sing. It was necessary, therefore, to let her know in time that there were to be no more lessons; not for the present at least — certainly not in the rooms in the Rue St Jacques where Blakemore was likely to come.

"And is he to take her away?" Miss Warley asked when Manders had finished.

"Take her away!" he cried, becoming rigid and looking fiercely at Miss Warley. "No!" Then interpreting the surprise of her eyes, he fell into a tremble, looked down, fumbling with his cap, and saying, in such a humbled way that she put her hand tenderly upon his head, "I don't know. They haven't talked to me. I came away because—because I have my work to do. What makes you think he is going to take her away?"

"Because I think it would be good for her. Come;

it is not a thing to make you unhappy—you would go with them. She wouldn't go away and leave you."

"Yes; she is going away to leave me. I know that well enough. I have known that a long time—but I didn't think anyone could take her from me—anyone but God."

"No one but God can take her from you, dear. Come; you are not fit for your work to-day. Don't go. Stay with me, and after a while I'll go with you to see your maman and Mr Blakemore. You can't sing to-day."

"I don't have to be happy to sing. I sing best when it pains here," pressing his clenched hand against his breast. "They'll pay me well for my songs to-day."

Blakemore thought as Miss Warley thought, and about the time she was talking on the subject with Manders he was asking Doctor Besnard as to the advisability of taking Marie away. He had followed the doctor to the door.

"Don't you think a change of scene would be beneficial?"

"Oh! changes help for a little while sometimes,—as long as they tonic the mind. I should not expect much from it in this case. You are better than a change of scene. I'm going to speak frankly to you. Madame Manders, who was a woman of exceptional constitution, would never have fallen a victim to this disease if she had not been pining—that is the right

word, Monsieur Blakemore — if she had not been pining for a love that was for some reason denied her."

"Refused by her, doctor."

"I do not quarrel with terms. I had some idea of the kind from the first, and in spite of her reticence I gathered enough from subsequent conversations with her to confirm my opinion. When I entered her room half an hour ago and observed the way she looked at you the case was perfectly clear to me. If you had come six months ago I should not have had to tell you as I tell you now—you have come too late."

"I did not know. Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing. The only question is as to how long you personally—by your presence, by your manner, by your devotion, can avert the inevitable. The mind prolongs life, and I am not so sure that it couldn't save life if we only knew how to use it, and used it in time."

"I was thinking of going by boat to the south coast?"

"A delightful trip—but wait a few days." The doctor spoke kindly, not encouragingly. "You see her stronger than she really is. She is sustained by an extraordinary excitement to-day. Wait until I can judge how far the reaction is likely to take her."

"Why should there be any reaction? Why do you expect it?"

"Because we doctors don't know any better."

The door of the inner room opened and Marie appeared, leaning against the frame as she said smilingly,—

"I am afraid you two are talking behind my back. I tried to hear you but couldn't. It isn't polite of you to leave me alone while you gossip about I don't know what."

"You are right," said the doctor, cheerily; "we were conspiring against you. We were planning a river excursion all the way to the Mediterranean by boat. How would you like that?"

"Charming, doctor! But, alas! you are always talking to me of doing things I can't afford."

"Well, be a good girl for a week and maybe one of the saints will drop a purse in your lap. Here, don't go back in there to lie down. Put a shawl around you and sit out on the balcony. There isn't any better sunshine than that this side of Kingdom Come, and it's criminal to waste it. Keep her out in it, Monsieur Blakemore, as long as it lasts. I must be off. I can't waste all my time here with you, my girl, for I have people who are really sick to look after. Good-bye. I've got to make a call up this way to-morrow morning. Maybe I'll have time to drop in here for a moment, but don't expect me."

"What a humbug you are, doctor!"

He had fairly carried her into the tiny balcony in front of the two long porte-windows of the back room, the windows opening on to it at a level with

the floor. He wrapped her up lightly and, jesting that she only clung to this affectation of sickness because she liked his attentions, shook a finger at her rebukingly, and left her to Blakemore.

There was not room for two chairs on the balcony, and Blakemore sat just behind Marie and within the room.

"That makes it easy for you to use me as a cushion," he said, inducing her to lean against him.

"It seems to me that we have sat this way before, and that you said just those same words to me. Indeed, all the time since you came, everything has been like a repetition of something said or done in the same way before. Don't you think it very queer? I mean the way one's fancies play tricks with one?"

"You know some people believe that we are not having new experiences in this life but are only living over old ones."

"You and I are not silly enough to believe that, are we? But tell me why you came back to Paris?"

"To be with you."

"That is what you said a while ago, and I didn't scold you because it pleased me. I let myself think for a little time that you really had come back to be with me. But I am asking you seriously now. Have you come to work? Have you done great work since I saw you? And the picture—did you ever finish it? I am foolish to ask so many questions. I don't know how it is, but you seem to answer them as fast as I ask them, or else they answer themselves. My mind

behaves strangely when I haven't got my sewing. I think you'd better hand it to me from the table in the other room, I haven't taken a stitch since you came. You must not make an idler of me."

"I should like to see you idling on the seashore! I want you to be well enough to start by the end of the week. We'll have a jolly trip down the river in a boat of our own—you and Manders, and Miss Warley, perhaps, and I. And when we come to the sea—"

She interrupted him with a purring sort of laugh.

"You remind me of the way my father told fairy stories when I was a little girl. He was always sending ships to sea, and I used to sail away in them to wonderful countries. Our fairy tales never come true, do they?"

"But this is not a fairy story—it is going to be sure enough."

She smiled, looking into the blue distances and shaking her head.

"No; I'm never going away from these little rooms. I've only been waiting for you, Walter, Now that you have come, there is but one thing more to wait for—just the one thing, Walter."

There was a stir among the leaves of a tree that hung over the roof of a low house opposite them, and he drew the wrap closer about her throat, holding it in place.

"You are not to talk in that way. All that is past. We are to be happy together; I'll have to scold you in my turn, if you don't keep that in mind."

She put up her hand to stroke his cheek and press his head against her own.

"Yes, we are to be happy together—but here where I knew you first. They wanted me to go away long ago, but I would not. I never told them why, but they seemed to understand that it was best to let me have my way. It was best, too. I could not have waited for you so long anywhere else."

"But you will go with me! We can be so much happier if you will do as I wish! It is so much pleasanter away from the cities at this time of the year! You would like to see Marseilles again?"

"For me there is no place pleasanter than this. I am content. I am happy. There is only one thing to make me sorrowful now—but I have wept all my tears away over it—my boy, my poor Edward, my Manders—what is to become of him?"

"He will be cared for, Marie—you yourself will care for him, and then—and then he shall come to me."

"Ah! Walter, you are good! Love my boy! I know he is to be something in the world, but a little child cannot fight his way alone. And he will miss me so. It is worth while dying if you will take my place. You cannot help but love him. I haven't failed of my duty altogether if I leave him such a friend as you. What a foolish thing my life has been. I wonder why God plays with us?"

"Marie! We are not going to talk any more in this way. I have a multitude of things to tell you—"

"Yes—and tell me first about Miss Storey. I thought you would be married by this time. When is it to be?"

"It is not to be, Marie."

"Not to be? Why?"

"Because she has found out that I am not the kind of man that she can love."

"Not the kind of man! Ha! you are jesting with me!" She put up her hand and gave his cheek a reproving pinch.

"No; she was right, Marie. I am too easily swayed by circumstances to suit a woman who demands that her husband be the master of his own destiny, a governor of forces."

"But you are an artist—an artist with something of the poet in him! What is greater than a great artist? She doesn't love you, then?'

"No."

"Poor Walter! They say the heart wears out that loves without having love in return."

"Let me console myself in loving you, Marie!" He put his arms about her.

"You pity me," she said, closing her eyes, her lips quivering as she spoke.

"No, I pity myself. My chance of happiness came and dwelt with me and I turned aside from it, not knowing. I am being punished through you, Marie, who should have been my inspiration and my reward. It was such a love as yours that I needed to make my life complete."

She made no reply, and her arm slipped from the support of the chair and hung down, limp and motionless. She was as still as if life had left her; but there was a faint, sweet smile on her lips and the lashes of her eyes were wet with tears. Her face was turned a little toward him, her head resting against his arm on the top of the chair. He regarded her for some time in silence, marvelling at the serene and noble beauty of the white, thin face. It was not the face he had painted. He looked at the chin; the dimple was no longer there. He bent to kiss the spot where it had been.

CHAPTER XXIII

NOTHING further was said about going away. "There is nothing to gain by going," Doctor Besnard said to Blakemore, with a shake of the head the next day, and the headshake conveyed more than the words declared. Besides, had Marie been readier for the excursion proposed, there really was no reason for wishing to quit Paris just now. The city had put on more than its customary charm of autumnal beauty and softness, and the air of the mornings and afternoons and evenings was like a caress. No place could be better tempered to the delicate needs of an invalid, and Marie—one of those misguided creatures who imagine that absence from Paris is exile—thought no scene could be so lovely or so delight-giving. In her opinion, a drive in the Bois far exceeded in lively interest and wholesome benefit any possible driftings by river or rockings by sea, for her nature was exclusively terrestrial. So there were drives in the Bois, Marie being carried up and down the stairs, to and from the carriage, in the arms of Blakemore, a portage which had an agreeably perilous excitement for her. Usually Miss Warley went with them, and sometimes the captain

lent his amiable presence to the party; but neither Marie nor Blakemore noticed that Manders managed not to be about when neither of the Warleys were to go for the drive, though Marie unconsciously missed something of value from the benefits of the outings when Manders was not in his favoured place on the box with the coachman. Nor did anyone notice as the drives were gradually discontinued and finally given up altogether, that dark lines were coming under the boy's eyes, and that there was a drawing down at the corners of the mouth, such as suffering makes in faces below which beat resisting hearts. These signs seemed to vanish mysteriously under Marie's eyes, and she comforted herself with saying, "He doesn't know;" but he might have told her of clairvoyant nights and of visions by day had he not come to know that some prophecies are sacred alone to the mind that shapes them. Shutting these experiences—for they were realities to him—within the silences of his own thought had matured his faculties to such an extent that there was little more of the child left in him than the anxiously adoring love of Marie that had always filled his heart. He was readier than she would have believed for the hour when he should no longer have to look into her face with a smile while he fought down the wish to clasp his arms about her neck and pour out his agony in tears.

When the drives were abandoned, and Marie contented herself with the recreation of sitting on the

balcony, or lying near the open window while Blakemore read from one of the few books she cared for, Manders got into the way of keeping to the streets of the neighbourhood, returning to the house at intervals to climb the stairs and listen at the door, or peer in if there seemed to be too great a silence. Expectancy of an invisible coming makes the heart afraid. Manders feared not to be there when the Comer arrived. Yesterday, however, he had crossed the river to the boulevards, and though a marvellous chance had come to him, terror seized him and fled with him to his home only to mock him with the tranquillity he found there. But the memory of that terror kept him at home to-day; and then, too, he had something to tell Marie.

"Can you believe," he said, smiling to her when they were alone, "that I forgot you for a little time yesterday?"

"No, I won't believe it; but tell me about it."

"Did you ever feel yourself pulled along, as if you had to go where you didn't want to?"

"Yes; everybody feels that way sometimes."

"I do often, and I always let it pull me, because I sometimes think it's God. It might be, don't you think?"

"Who knows?"

"Well, yesterday it was that way, and I went on until I found myself at the Madeleine as the people were coming out from a mass. I thought what a fine crowd to sing for and I began singing. But

they didn't stop to listen—not many. I only got twelve sous out of all that crowd. Then, do you know what I thought? I thought God didn't pull me that time!"

"Ah, people coming out of church are not the people to sing to," said Marie, with playful seriousness.

"I found that out and started up the boulevard. When I came to the Grand Hotel, I stopped under the arch and looked into the court. There were a good many ladies and gentlemen sitting about, and I just felt as if I must go in and sing to them. I was never in there before, but I went in and walked up to the wide steps that go all the way across one side. You know, don't you? Well, I put one foot on the bottom step, took off my cap, and before anybody knew what I was about I began singing. Right away a man with a uniform on came towards me waving his hand for me to go away, and calling to me to stop. But a lady with white hair—I shouldn't be surprised if she is a queen somewhere — held up her hand and said, 'No, no, let him sing; he is a pretty child and has a sweet voice,' and others said so, too, and the man didn't drive me away, and I sang, and they gave me silver pieces, more than I've ever earned before."

"That was beautiful," Marie said, a loving hand on his head, a happy light in her eyes.

"But that was not the best of it!" exclaimed Manders, struggling to repress the excitement that

was getting the better of his dignity. "They were very nice to me, to be sure, but it was when I was going away that the big thing happened!"

"Something happened?"

"I should say so! A gentleman followed me out, and on the street he said he would like to talk with me; so I went into the *café* on the corner with him. He asked me all kinds of questions about myself, about you, about my singing, and if I could read and write—and then—and then—what do you think he said? Oh! you needn't squeeze your brows together! You could never guess. I'm going to tell you. He said he wanted me for a children's opera company that he was going to have in the United States, and he said—are you listening?—that he would give me one hundred francs a week and take care of me!"

There was an expression on Marie's face that turned all his triumph into despair, and he cried out,—

"But I told him I wouldn't leave you for all the money in the world."

"No, dear," she said, smiling now, "you would never leave me; I wasn't afraid of that. I was thinking that this may be a friend God has sent to you just when you may need a friend. And you don't know who he is."

"Yes, he gave me his card."

"Keep it, little one. Who knows what may come of it. Monsieur Walter perhaps can tell you if this is a worthy man."

Manders took one of his mother's hands, stroking it in a way that always indicated to her his embarrassed but negative state of mind.

"If you please, maman," he said, "I don't want M. Walters to know about it—not yet—not till I tell him myself."

"What a man you are getting to be! Eh, well! manage your own affairs! I shall not tell him, monsieur! But you might be condescending enough to kiss me for keeping your secret."

She seemed so proud of him, was so elated by the incident of the "manager"—for that was the distinctive word on the card—and entered so heartily into fancies and predictions of what his future should be, that Manders rose into such a glow of spirit as he had not known in months, and Miss Warley thought them very much too animated when she came in for the afternoon, it being one of her half-holidays.

"Never mind," Marie said in reply to Miss Warley's chidings, "you mustn't blame Manders, and there is no use scolding me, you know. As for taking a nap, Walter is coming to read to me presently; that always puts me to sleep, he reads so well."

When Blakemore came, Manders, his apprehensions calmed by the joyous hour with Marie, felt privileged to make a short tour in the quarter of the Luxembourg. "I don't have to earn much; I'm rich today; I won't be long away," he laughed to Miss Warley as he went out the door.

"Shall I go on with 'The Idyls of the King?'"

Blakemore asked, reaching down the Tennyson from the tiny shelf at the right of the window.

"Yes, I suppose so, only—"

"Only what?"

"I wonder if you two will laugh at me! But I've been thinking that I'd like to hear you read something out of the Bible? Would you? looking at him wistfully yet diffidently.

"Why not? It is one of the best reading books in the world. Where is your Bible?"

"In my room, under the pillow. Will you get it, Miss Warley? I've been reading it a little to myself every day, I don't know why; I never used to care for it. I'm so glad you don't laugh at me, Walter."

"Laugh at you, Marie! I believe in the Bible."

"Ah," she sighed in a satisfied way, "then read to me the ninth chapter of Acts. That seems to me most wonderful—Paul so strangely converted and able to raise the dead to life."

When he had done reading she asked, "Don't you think we, too, could heal the sick, and bring the dead to life again, if we really believed in Christ and His teachings?"

He looked at her curiously, smiling, but making no answer. He wondered if there were any real believers in Christ and the Word, if the Christian religion were anything more in these days than a carefully-guarded scabbard for the sword of political power. Marie thought the smile was at the expense of her credulity.

"I suppose I am foolish," she admitted. "Read me something else."

He turned here and there in the book, reading chapters chosen at random until he saw that she slept, lying easily in the invalid's chair, stretched before the open window. He sat watching her for sometime, and Miss Warley brought a light wrap to lay across her shoulders.

"I think she has been too excited to-day," she whispered. "I hope she will have a good, restful sleep."

Blakemore put down the book and rose saying,—

"Yes. I'll go down and finish some letters. I'll come back at six o'clock, though if she should wake and want me, I'll be ready at any time. Would you call me? I'm on the first floor, left, you know."

That she might not disturb Marie, Miss Warley took her chair and embroidery into the other room when Blakemore had gone. After an hour she looked in upon Marie, who was still in that serene sleep, and in the same posture as before, save that one arm was now curved above her head. Miss Warley smiled and resumed her work. Another hour and there was the sound of careful footsteps ascending the oak stairs. Manders was coming. Miss Warley went quickly to the door, and opened it softly as Manders stepped upon the landing.

"Sh!" she said, putting her finger on her lips, and as he tiptoed in, she added, "She is sleeping beautifully, and has been for the last two hours."

"That is good for her, is it not?" said Manders.

"Very good. She doesn't often have such un-

broken sleep for so long a time, I know right well. Now that you have come, I think I'll go. Mr Blakemore is coming at six. What time does the woman come?"

"At seven."

"And stays until morning?"

"Yes, she gets coffee for us."

"I'll come in at noon to-morrow. Can I do anything for you before I go?"

"No, I thank you."

"You look tired."

"But I am not. I'll sit here, where I can watch her through the doorway, and wait till she wakes. I've something to tell her, something to amuse her. I wish you could be here."

"Don't wake her up with wanting to amuse her," shaking a warning finger at him as she whispered.

"I sha'n't wake her," he whispered.

"Good-bye."

He closed the door behind her, and came to take up his post of watching just where through the doorway he could look into Marie's face, the smile on which he could just distinguish in the shadow thrown by her arm curved above her head. He thought as he watched how still and calm she slept; he was hardly sure whether there was any motion of the light covering above her breast as she breathed, and he seemed to be trying to breathe as gently himself, as if a sigh too rude might break the peaceful spell that sleep had laid lovingly upon her.

Blakemore looked up from his writing to the clock on his mantelpiece, and found that it was a quarter of an hour after the time he had told Miss Warley he would return. He arose at once and started up the stairs. As he came near to Marie's door, he heard Manders singing, a weirdness in his voice that made it almost strange, and he stopped to listen, doubting if he had rightly located the sound. He had not been mistaken, and he recognised the song, the quaint, sad-tuned trifle Manders used to love so much to have Marie sing while he stood weeping by her side. He remembered the words, and could follow the singing though the words were hardly distinguishable—

"If the light should go and the roses fade,
And earth grow cold and the birds not sing,
My heart should not be the least afraid,
For love of you makes eternal spring!
But should we miss love, you and I,
Though death were life, my soul would die."

He opened the door and went quickly into the inner room. Manders was on his knees beside Marie, his arms clasped about her, holding her close to his breast, rocking to and fro with her as he sang, his cheek pressed against hers, his eyes shut and tearless. Marie's arms hung limply down; she gave no response to his caresses. Hearing someone enter, he stopped his song and opened his eyes, and seeing Blakemore, said slowly, as he still rocked to and fro, cradling the dreamless sleeper,—

"She is mine now—mine! Don't touch her!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"WHERE is Manders?" Captain Warley asked when they were ready to come away from that walled-in city in which Marie is waiting for the new day.

The four of them, Manders, Blakemore and the Warleys, had gone in the same carriage, and now that the mission was ended, the others suddenly missed the desolated object of their common sympathies. The man looked about anxiously, but Miss Warley, better understanding the boy than the others could, said presently,—

"Let us not try to find him. He can take care of himself."

"Yes," said the captain, "Matilda is right. He is an odd little chap. We wouldn't know how to comfort him." Then a little while later, as they drove along, he asked feelingly, "What is to become of the boy?"

"If he will come with me," said Blakemore, "I will do with him as if he were my own."

"A generous purpose, Mr Blakemore. There is nothing else that he can do. I'm sure he will be glad to go with you. But hasn't he any relatives?"

"His father had some brothers in England, but I believe he has nothing to hope for from them."

"Hasn't he any rights?"

"I think not."

"Well, it doesn't matter if he has such a man as you to look out for him. Besides, it isn't such a hard fate for a boy with the right sort of stuff in him to have to take hold of the world for himself. I think 'expectations' have been the ruin of more lads than have ever been benefited by them. Almost every man who has been worth a pinch of salt in the affairs of the world has had to battle his way up single-handed from most unfavourable beginnings. It takes fighting to bring the best qualities into development, to give force to character. I am the bankrupt of a prodigal youth myself. My father did me the incalculable injury of leaving me twenty thousand pounds, without having taught me how to spend it. Luckily, I had sense enough to use the dregs to buy a small commission in the army, and I was able to patch together the shreds of manhood well enough to make a fairly decent showing as a soldier. The devil! if it were not for the asylum the army offers them thousands of decent young men would go bag and baggage to the dogs in England, because we have made it rather a discreditable, if not dishonourable, thing for a gentleman to be self-supporting through his own industry. That is where you Americans are a generation or two ahead of us. You are civilised enough to appreciate the

dignity of labour. Give the boy a chance, Mr Blakemore, but prepare him to be self-reliant and independent. Make him understand that he has got to hew out his own path. Do you know, sir, that the thing for which I most honour the Prince of Wales is the fact that he knows how to make a pair of shoes? That is something he can do for himself; he had nothing to do with being born heir to a throne! Teach Manders to make shoes, horseshoes if necessary, but don't cram a silver spoon down his throat to choke him to death."

Blakemore saw nothing more of Manders that day, but the following morning there was a knock at his door, and in answer to his "*Entrez*," Manders came in.

"I want to talk with you," he said.

"And I with you, Manders," Blakemore said kindly, holding out his hand.

Manders, who stood just inside the door, made no responsive movement, though his face was unclouded, and his eyes looked frankly, calmly toward Blakemore.

"You and I should be the best of friends, Manders. I am your friend with all my heart. Why are you not mine? What has changed you? You used to be fond of me. Why are you not now?"

Standing as he was, and with no change of the placid expression that seemed so unnatural to Blakemore, Manders said, without a tremor of feeling,—

"One night my maman said things in her sleep

that no one else but you should have ever heard. Should I shake hands with you?"

Blakemore felt his own go down under the gaze of the boy's clear eyes. He had risen and gone toward Manders, but he returned to his desk and sat down.

"When you are older, Manders, you will know that we sometimes do the things that we would give our lives to have undone again. Well, lad?"

"I want to know how much you have paid out in these weeks?"

If Manders had crossed over and struck his fist into Blakemore's face, the effect upon the man would not have been different from that produced by these words.

"Manders, my boy," looking with steady reproach at him, but speaking with gentleness, "don't forget that I too was loved!"

There was a momentary loosening of the boy's lips and a quivering of the eyelids, and then the calm again. He had thought of all this. He had considered everything. He was prepared for just this reminder.

"That is why I sent for you," he said. "But that is over now. There is nothing for you to do for her. I have everything to do for her. I must live my life for her. I hated you when you came; I don't hate you now. Shall I tell you why? Mère Pugens has talked to me. She told me what my papa was and how he died. It's an awful thing to die that way. And Mère Pugens told me other things so that I

might understand; but I don't understand all; I only know that I have got to live so that my maman need not be ashamed. She must not blame herself for me. I must begin in the right way. How much have you paid out? And Mère Pugens says that you must have paid Miss Warley, too. How much is it all?"

"I do not know; I have no account."

"You are a man; men always know these things; tell me."

Blakemore felt himself at a question of honour with this boy in whom there was so little boyishness. He could not trifle with him; he could not humble a dignity that did not need years to make it admirable. He figured with his pencil for a minute or so, and gravely handed Manders a slip of paper on which the approximate total was given.

"Those figures will cover everything," he said. "And now let us talk a little of your future, Manders. I want to help you."

"I cannot stop now. I have to be on the other side of the river at noon. Good-bye, M. Blakemore."

"This afternoon or to-morrow morning, then," Blakemore said, as Manders opened the door.

"Good-bye, M. Blakemore," Manders repeated, going out and shutting the door behind him.

The next morning Blakemore found this letter thrust under his door, the envelope unaddressed:—

"M. BLAKEMORE,—This will Tell you that i oh you 1,800 francs and That I Will pay you. i dont no when but I know i will. i shall send It to you as fast as i urn it. i Am going awa, and not see you ani more. I have taking all my things in the little trunk that is mine and som things that are maman's. i leave all the rest of the rooms as they are. if there is ani thing in them you want it is yours. i Have taking maman's pillow tho. the piano is Miss Warleys. the concierge has got the key. i dont Hate you ani more. i think Im sorry for you. Good Bye.

"EDOUARD MANDERS."

THE END

It may come as a pleasant surprise to many of our readers to learn that the young American who made so great an impression as Siegfried at Covent Garden on Tuesday night is only adoptively an American. Mr Edward Manders, though a native of Paris, is really an Englishman, his father having been a member of the well-known Devonshire family, of which Mr Mark Manders, M.P., is now the honoured and distinguished head. This, however, is his first visit to England. Young Manders is said to have made a professional beginning at the age of eight years, when he sang as a principal in one of the juvenile opera companies with which the Americans amused themselves for several seasons eighteen or twenty years ago. After that experience, he suffered the vicissitudes that unprotected youth must undergo in the battle for existence, but he may feel an excusable pride in the fact that he made his own way to success, though he was not without friends who were willing to aid him. We believe Lady Kentmoor was one of these early friends whose gracious offers were declined in a perhaps laudable spirit of independence. Last evening Mr Manders, who will be heard for the second time as Siegfried to-morrow night, occupied a seat in the box with Lord and Lady Kentmoor and their lovely daughter the Lady Florence.—*Extract from the* ST JAMES'S GAZETTE.

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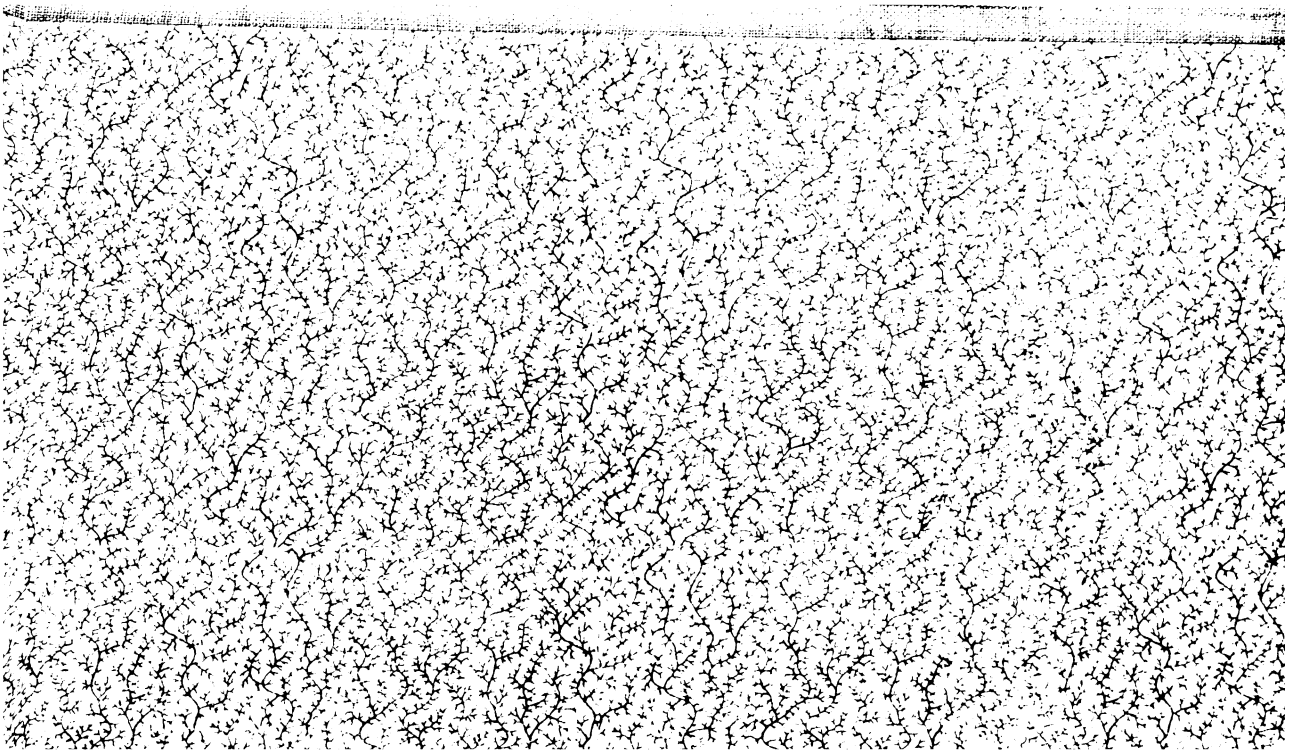
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